LONE WOLF SPECIAL!

#52

EXCLUSIVE! INTERVIEW WITH JAPANESE CO-CREATORS
KAZUO KOIKE & GOZEKI KOJIMA

FRANK MILLER
SPEAKS HIS MIND!

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE
FIRST COMICS CREW
FROM RAW TALENT TO RAW FISH —!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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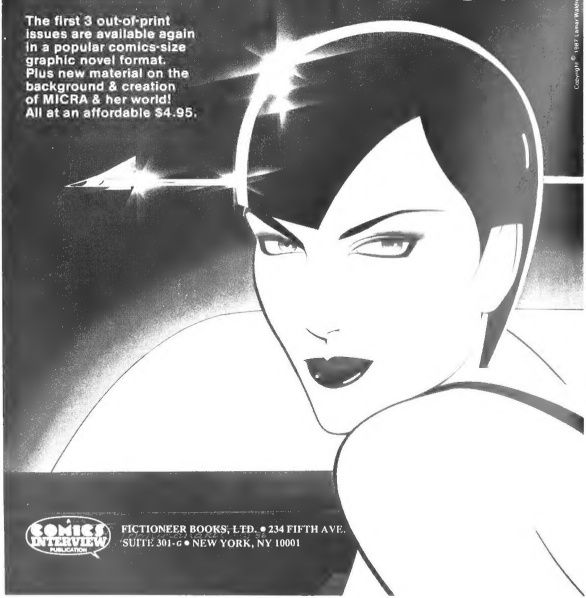

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UP FRONT

For some time now, we have been hearing about the comics of Europe and Japan — how great they are, how widely accepted they are, even how the superhero genre is a small and for the most part insignificant presence in those markets.

Sure, HEAVY METAL has done a commendable job over the years importing and translating some foreign comics for us, and an interesting assortment of Canadian and British material has found its way into our market — but that has been just a drop in the bucket. And some foreign language material has been imported and can be found on the shelves here and there, for those fortunate enough to know where to look, and fortunate enough to have those places near — constituting another drop in the bucket.

But mainly we've had to sit back and listen while those in the know, those fortunate few with access to the European and/or Japanese markets, expostulated against what we knew in favor of that which we could not. Talk about a no-win situation, talk about cruel and unusual punishment!

Well, we're finally getting to see for ourselves. The year 1987 goes down in the records for not one but two major cross-cultural comics events. Marvel has brought out a graphic novel series by **Moebius,** the acclaimed French artist/writer (see COMICS INTERVIEW #45), while from across a wider ocean First Comics has brought us LONE WOLF AND CUB, a Japanese series of unparalleled success — the very material which those in the know acknowledge as among the top of the line, if not the very best of the best. At last we all can explore the facts for ourselves! Still only drops in the bucket, perhaps, but these drops are of the golden nectar. Cigars all around.

— Darrel L. Boatz
Associate Editor

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"Marvel and DC got scared and we almost

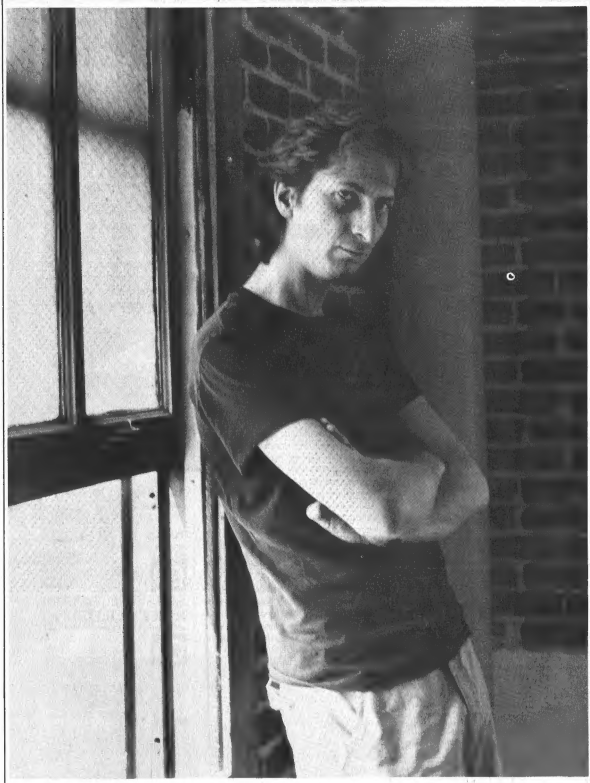
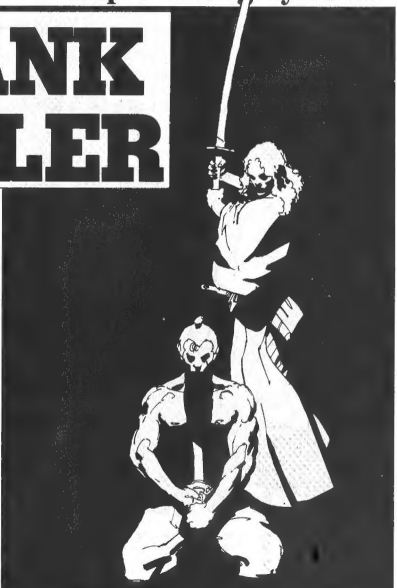


Photo: Suzan Ellen

Frank Miller in his Los Angeles apartment.

got stuck with a stupid rating system."

FRANK MILLER



Even though the Great Censorship Debate has died down for the present, it's sure to rear its head again sooner or later. Things like that come in cycles, says Frank Miller, who's using the hiatus to plan a strategy to nip it in the bud next time around.

MARK BORAX: *Where's the censorship issue now? What are you doing?*

FRANK MILLER: I'm talking with different artists, trying to keep people informed. I'm planning to publish a booklet, once I've got permission from everybody and all the material. Maybe we can get something from this whole stupid debate that will be of some lasting value, a weapon to use the next time people start getting scared. It could save us the trouble of covering what's already covered in the BUYER'S GUIDE editorials. The next time this pops up we can hit the ground running.

The rumblings from **Falwell** and company seem to have died down. Those people have been busy trying to keep themselves in business and, in some cases, out of prison. Some retailers and distributors might still be afraid that the big bad wolf is going to come to their door, and want to make sure the door's open for him. *(Laughter.)* That really seems to be the extent of it right now. Censorship isn't a real threat to the industry right now, not from outside. It is, however, still a threat within the industry, because there's been a real history of . . .

MARK: *Turning tail?*

FRANK: Turning tail, yeah.

MARK: *Who will your booklet be aimed at, the retailers and distributors?*

FRANK: Whoever might want it. It's planned to feature mainly the remarks of artists. As simple as the actual events have been with DC's rating system and our protest, the way it's been presented has been very very confusing to anybody not involved in the fight. One of the questions I'm most frequently asked is. "It's just a little label across the cover, what does it matter?" That's one of the questions the booklet might answer:

MARK: *Well, what does it matter?*

FRANK: In and of itself, maybe nothing. I sure as hell wouldn't accuse **Denis Kitchen** of being a censor. What's so dangerous about DC's plan is that it's exactly what **Steve Geppi** and **Buddy Saunders** wanted, and that a distributor had a plan that was structurally identical, ready to go, and there was plenty of talk along those lines up at Marvel. A codified rating system. One law for the whole field, all to please **Swaggart** and **Falwell** and those other monsters. The worst thing about it is who it was being done for, and what we might've lost.

Marvel and DC hire their own censors, but they haven't been using the Comics Code on everything lately and there's all these other publishers around doing uncensored comics, so things have loosened up. They just got scared, that's all, and we almost got stuck with a stupid rating system. It'd be a nightmare to work under and we'd never get rid of it. It's been 30 years since the Comics Code was drafted and there's no sign of that going away yet; although it might just collapse under the weight of all of these new "standards and practices." But . . . a simple stupid decision by DC Comics, and, had Marvel Comics joined in, that would have saddl-

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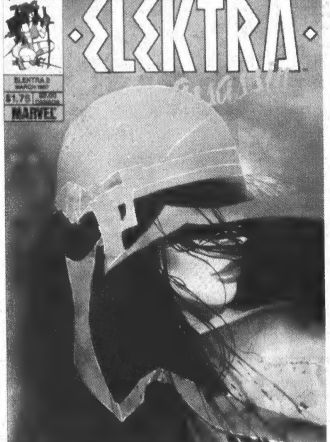
"A bastard sneezes and Marvel & DC scram-



Marvel's three different imprints, Epic, Star and Marvel. "It's perfectly legitimate to have different trademarks. That's very different from an industry-wide rating system."

ed the industry with an internal bureaucracy with no purpose but appeasing pressure groups and nervous retailers. Like the Comics Code and the MPAA rating system and all of their counterparts in TV, its effects would be invisible to the readers, sinister and anticreative as they are.

MARK: *What do you think of Marvel's tack — instead of rating their comics as for adult, young adult, children, of just doing the Star Line, the Marvel line and the Epic Line?*

FRANK: It's perfectly legitimate to have different trademarks just to keep a focus on what you're doing. That's very very different from an industry-wide ratings system, which is what seemed to be forming.

MARK: *Some retailers complain that comics are perceived as kids' literature and parents are incensed when they go in and see something that they don't expect. Instead of having retailers get-labels, do you think Marvel's way can handle that problem for the retailers?*

FRANK: You'd really have to ask the retailers about that. I understand it does. As I saw them getting more and more nervous, I proposed exactly the same thing to DC Comics. I suggested they start a new line, their equivalent of Epic but using the graphic novel and DARK KNIGHT formats to distinguish the material. It's part of the publisher's *job* to use its formats and design its covers to be true to what's inside.

At its hypothetical best, speaking theoretically and ignoring what these things always turn into, a ratings system would still be nothing more than a cheap, synthetic way of trying to *enforce* honesty on the part of a publisher. Honesty *itself* would work much better. This nightmare, if it really catches on in comics . . very soon we'd see writers and artists jockeying for different ratings on different titles, trying to please the people in charge of the ratings. And believe me, whoever's in charge of those ratings, they're not going to be the best of our species. The job censor does not attract the best people. I could see it turning into a very powerful part of the industry that only works to the detriment of the work itself.

The only work of mine I'm aware of that's gotten complaints along these lines is ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN. I've looked at various newspaper and TV stories, most of it's been raves. The one or two complaints have all come from right-wing idiots. The simple answer is to tell these people to take a flying leap. We have the truth on our side. We have the First Amendment on our side. The comics industry is the home of heroes who stand for truth and justice, for freedom against slavery, but every time one of these bastards out there sneezes, Marvel and DC go into a scramble to figure out who's gonna go belly up first. We can stand and fight, we can win!

All of this is ridiculous, the contention and agony within the industry that was created by an evangelist or two filling a few seconds of air time, trying to scare money out of people; all this terror just really doesn't speak well for our field nor how clearly we think nor how much courage we have nor how much we believe in what we're doing. We must believe in the kind of comics that are being born right now, the kind of comics that have to be done. We must take the aggressive role, tell people that comics aren't just cotton candy. We enjoyed a great deal of media attention, telling the world that there are comics out there that adults can enjoy. We really have the edge. The anti-comics press has been very very very small, very tiny, and the pro-comics press has been unprecedented. We'd be cowards to back away, stupid cowards.

MARK: *Do you think that when DC and possibly Marvel get scared about these threats, are they afraid of the public's perception or are they afraid as well of their distributors and retailers who may clamor? I mean, they have to answer to two threats — internal and external.*

FRANK: I, of course, can't tell what's running through their minds. But comics

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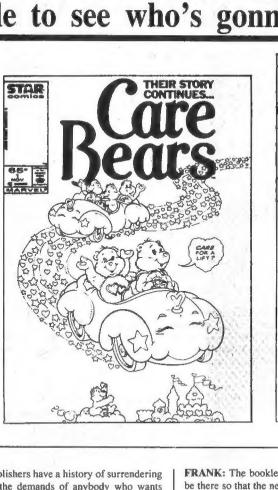
ble to see who's gonna go belly up first."



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publishers have a history of surrendering to the demands of anybody who wants them. It's appalling, how the DC ratings system evolved. They're afraid of **Jerry Falwell.** They receive a letter from a guy who runs some comics shops in Texas, wailing for the sanitized comics of his youth. Within a week they have a ratings system.

MARK: *Having one proposed.*

FRANK: Yeah, having one proposed, and having it drafted a few weeks after that. Clearly, there was pressure going on inside the industry. The major cause of this nightmare isn't **Jimmy Swaggart** or **Jerry Falwell.** It's the confusion in the minds of people who publish and distribute and sell comics, their confusion over sudden changes in the industry — sudden high sales, sudden exposure, the sudden success of material that is clearly and deliberately not for little kids. It complicates everyone's job. It also makes us a much more serious contender in the popular culture. The gut level thrust of the whole pro-censorship movement has been a desire to turn the clock back; turn us back into the mousey little industry we were for 30 years.

MARK: *And so your booklet is aimed at making sure we don't turn the clock back?*

FRANK: The booklet is really going to be there so that the next time we have to have this fight — and there is going to be a next time — we will have a certain amount of material together, a certain amount of intellectual ammunition and a certain number of cartoons.

MARK: *So tell us about your booklet. What format will it be in?*

FRANK: It's in the very early stages of planning, I just got the idea for it a couple of days ago.

MARK: *But it's prose?*

FRANK: Have to wait and see what people do. The artists who are fighting censorship have tremendous solidarity on this issue, and there are a lot of us.

MARK: *Will the text pieces be rewrites or interviews that you have done or —*

FRANK: Some of what's in it will be editorials from the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE lifted whole, particularly **Mark Evanier's, Alan Moore's** and **Chris Claremont's,** should they give permission. There's a lengthy piece by **Steve Bissette** that COMICS INTERVIEW ran part of as an editorial. It's a very long, involved, and very very perceptive and instructive piece. I really think this booklet will be a very good place for it, because of its length.

MARK: *Will you self-publish this? How will this be distributed?*

FRANK: I haven't figured that out yet. It's a little early for me to have all that nailed down. I'll be talking to people and figuring that all out.

MARK: *But basically you want to present it as something people will want to put on their shelves and refer to?*

FRANK: I have a four inch file of just the recent censorship controversy in comics, and what I'm trying to do is distill, in a way, the substance of what's valuable and what's worth keeping from that and have it available, for instance, should there be another case like Friendly Frank's. It would be very easy for one lone retailer out there to feel isolated and powerless — and I imagine that Friendly Frank felt that way at first — but there's been a lot of support for him and there'll be more support as it's needed, if it's needed. A booklet like this would help someone realize that there is support, that some people are willing to fight.

MARK: *Is there also going to be some legal material in there, like what things can happen and how the law can help retailers?*

FRANK: Whatever I can get explaining *how* modern censorship works, and how

"Jerry Falwell complained about X-MEN."

to fight it. Most vulnerable in this whole situation are the artists, as long as they're working for publishers who regard them as interchangeable and regard their work as essentially worthless. The artists had to lead this protest.

MARK: *Speaking about that protest, initially I believe the way that your letter or petition was worded was that you guys who signed that were saying that you were upset because DC was planning a ratings system without telling you about it?*

FRANK: It was written because of. . . I'll just tell you about the sequence of events. In a phone call from **Jenette Kahn** I was asked to remove a scene from BATMAN: YEAR ONE (which had been approved by every member of the DC staff that worked on it), because **Jerry Falwell** said Marvel's X-MEN ran nude pin-ups.

MARK: *That's what Jenette said?*

FRANK: Yes. And to Jenette's credit she did not insist that something be removed, she suggested a compromise and asked me for my reaction. She did not have it changed when I felt that it would have been detrimental to the story, although she certainly had the power to. But in the course of us discussing this I brought up some feeling about rating systems. The subject was coming up a lot in conversation in the field. There was a smell of fear in the air. **Jan Strnad** and the COMICS JOURNAL had done their bit for ratings a few years ago. Ever since then people have been talking about the pros and cons of ratings at Marvel and DC, and there'd been noise from one or two distributors. Jenette told me that DC was contemplating a rating system. I did my best to find out what was going on at Marvel and DC for the next couple of weeks. It became clear that Marvel was also considering a rating system.

Knowing I was upset, Jenette showed me the first draft of the ratings system. Reading it over — I hadn't yet seen the **Buddy Saunders** letter, didn't realize how closely one resembled the other — but I could see what kind of creature it was. I objected to DC's rating system very very strongly when Jenette showed it to me. I then sent copies of it around to all of the professionals I could get in touch with immediately, informing them that this was going on. Nobody had heard about it. I drafted a short statement to both Marvel and DC, saying that we understood that something was being put together here without us being informed and that we wanted to know what was going on. In response, DC announced their rating system to the public. You might be a bit confused because COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE ran the stories in reverse order, running DC's statement first, which they only released because of the petition. By doing so, DC seemed to be making it clear that they wanted to go through with the damn thing.

When forced. . . when I felt it became necessary, I drafted another letter which was much simpler, and Marv and Alan and Howard signed it with me. We said we'd take on no new work with DC for as long as they held to the rating system. Marv has been the target of economic retaliation from DC. Since signing that letter, **Giordano** fired him as an editor on the spot, and soon afterward he was fired from writing ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN. Marv's been treated horribly. It's really been the ugliest and most unpleasant thing about this fight. The protest on the artist's side, has been a gentlemanly one, very well meant. Marv in particular has had DC's best interests at heart. Marv was continuously looking for ways to show DC how much harm they would be doing to themselves. He was told after he was officially fired as an editor that if he were to publicly recant, to say

DC CONTINUITY-STRAIGHTENING TIME AGAIN Some readers may be confused about the censorship fiasco reported in the COMICS BUYERS GUIDE a few months back. Frank says DC publisher Jenette Kahn, who knew his feelings about ratings, showed him an early draft of their proposed system. Frank copied it and sent it to fellow professionals who he says knew nothing about it. Then he drafted a short statement to both Marvel and DC. After this, DC publicly announced their proposal, and Frank wrote the infamous letter signed by Alan Moore, Howard Chaykin and Marv Wolfman, which, he says, got Marv fired on the spot.

"DC tried to silence this issue."

that he didn't believe what he clearly and passionately believed, they would give him his job back. Marv's a good man. He held the line. His relationship with DC has deteriorated for no good reason. He has in no way attacked DC. He's been perfectly forthright in his position.

What they did to Marv was all the worse because almost nobody at DC believed in what they were doing. From all appearances DC's ratings system is pretty much kaput. When I talked with them, DC personnel referred to the ratings system as a mistake, as a fiasco. Even before that, I was told that it was just a trick anyway, as though it were meaningless. "It's just a way to fool people into *thinking* we're censoring ourselves. We wouldn't *actually* censor ourselves, it's just a way of fooling people." *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Including themselves.*

FRANK: Yeah! *(Laughter.)* But in defending their position, they were belligerent to Marv, and they've tried to silence this issue. **ROLLING STONE** was looking to get an interview with **Alan Moore.** I received a call from the guy who wrote that article on me, saying that he had called DC and had been told that they would not let him get in touch with **Alan Moore** because they didn't want Alan to speak. Because of the petition.

MARK: *And Alan Moore is a free-lance writer?*

FRANK: Yes, he is.

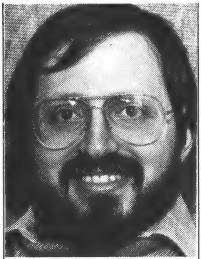
MARK: *He's not on DC's staff?*

FRANK: No. The only enemy we've got in all of this is silence. It's only when people aren't actually *looking* at censorship that it becomes such a difficult, and such a scary issue. It's simple enough, and it's not scary. It's been fought a million times. Comics stand out in entertainment, as far as I know, as the most cowardly on this issue, with the possible exception of TV.

MARK: *The Saturday morning cartoons.*

FRANK: Scared people have rewritten history. People think that the Senate Subcommittee proposed the Comics Code, not looking at the facts long enough to realize that the Comics Code was invented *after* the hearings *failed* to come to any decision against comics. It was invented when **Bill Gaines** tried to get the comic publishers together to combat pop psychiatrist **Frederic Wertham** and the parents' groups with publicity of their own. Shamefully, the other publishers shut **Gaines** down, working with distributors to prevent his books from getting to the stands, declaring to the entire world that we're nothing but little kid stuff.

MARK: *Right.*



FRANK: It's no wonder comics have a sleazy, low-brow reputation. We never denied it. We just promised to castrate outselves through self-censorship.

MARK: *So if in the heat of the '50s they couldn't shut comics down, why are people so worried about it now?*

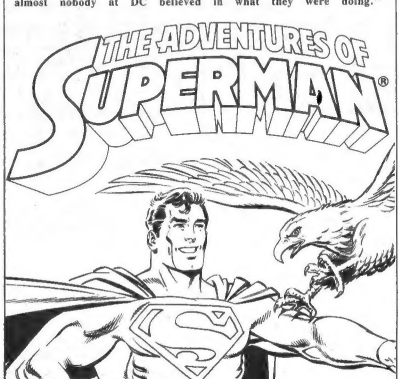
FRANK: I think they just haven't looked closely enough at the facts. A few people who sell comics were terrified because they were carrying material that they thought would get them in trouble. They think of themselves as isolated and up against huge, massive forces. We have to realize that when the publishers surrendered in the '50s, they surrendered our place in the arts. We've survived as a very quiet little subculture. Now there's a danger of us going mainstream again, a danger of high sales and respectability and better livings for all of us. That's caused a panic. That's cause a lot of fear.

We're equipped to fight the televangelists and the other censors. There are other organizations that can help us. We have the First Amendment, which continues to show its power. The Supreme Court recently made a decision that strengthens it, I believe, as it relates to the position of a comics retailer charged with peddling obscenity.

MARK: *What was the Supreme Court decision?*

FRANK: As I understand it, they effectively abolished the notion of community standards for obscenity, saying that a community may not dictate a separate aesthetic, a separate judgement of obscenity than the community next to it or a community across the country. A number of the judges that voted on it were upset because they wanted to completely abolish the notion of obscenity laws. That's how

"Marv's been treated horribly by DC. What they did was all the worse because almost nobody at DC believed in what they were doing."



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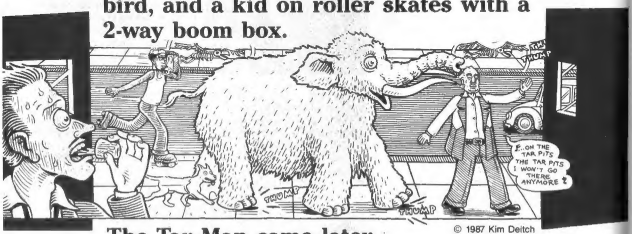
Myles Mycroft looked up one day and saw Larry Farrel being followed by a giant mastodon, a ghostly canine, a skeletal bird, and a kid on roller skates with a 2-way boom box.



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"Freedom of the press is a long nasty fight."

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close we came to just getting rid of the monster altogether. But it's better now than it was. It means that in Friendly Frank's case they have to prove that OMAHA and ELEKTRA. ASSASSIN are obscene by something slightly more objective than the prevailing prejudices and bigotries of their own little town.

MARK: *So one of the things the new Supreme Court ruling did was to put the judgement of censorship into the hands of a jury?*

FRANK: Into the hands of a jury, into the hands of —

MARK: *Out of this "community perception."*

FRANK: Right. The censors can't say, "Well, we *believe* in burning babies around here." They can't get away with that as easily anymore. I'm learning that freedom of the press is something that's a very long, nasty fight; that part of working on any form of literature, it seems, involves a continuous fight against people who want to turn you into propagandists for their own sides. Any surrender just invites these people to come in closer. It's unfortunate, too, that — at least to my eyes — the retailers and distributors have been so poorly represented. The picture that's been painted is of them all as frightened right-wingers. Many I've spoken to stand against censorship, in the form of a ratings system or anything else. But because **Geppi** and **Saunders** were the first to speak out, people are under the false assumption that that's where the retailers stand.

MARK: *Milton Griepp of Capital City took a stronger anti-censorship stand than some other distributors.*

FRANK: Yes, and **Bill Liebowitz** of Hollywood's Golden Apple Comics — certainly a retailer of comparable respect and intelligence and success to **Buddy Saunders** — stated in print unequivocally that he does not support a ratings system, and explained exactly why he believes it's a bad idea. Unlike Buddy, Bill believes that his shop should be his own to run, and that the fact that he owns a few retail outlets should not give him the power to dictate editorial policy to the companies nor dictate aesthetics and morals to the artists.

MARK: *If retailers have problems with some titles, they can make their own stand on how to display or not display those titles, but don't try to prohibit people from creating the titles.*

FRANK: Yeah. I don't run around from shop to shop telling people that they're not displaying things properly. A retailer's got every right to refuse my work if he can't stand by it. I'm willing to take that gamble. But there's *enough* obstacles between the artists and the audience right now, the work goes through *so much* already at Marvel or DC; to add one more step would I believe just . . . I don't know if it would make working impossible, but I'm not willing to go the distance to find out. There's a lot of other options out there, there's a lot of publishers who don't feel they have to make this concession What I was most afraid of was that DC and Marvel would join an industry-wide rating system, one distributors could force upon the smaller independents.

From ELECTRA: ASSASIN #3.

MARK: *So possibly one of the positive effects — we all know about the negative effects of the glut of the black-and-white publishers that cropped up — but one of the possible strong, positive effects is that you don't have to sell to Marvel or DC or even First or Eclipse or Comico anymore. There are alternatives in the numbers of publishers available.*

FRANK: I *love* the direct sales market That's why I'm fighting so hard. That's *why* I'm devoting a *lot* of time I'd much rather spend on my stories. I love working in comics. Compared to TV or movies, it's beautiful and it's simple and it's clean. There are so few middlemen You don't have to deal with the mafia or the MPAA or network "Standards and Practices." Once you're out from under the Code, there's freedom here. It's a wonderful place. It's also a very young place We're trying to learn how to use these new tools and freedoms we have. The old publishers are struggling, trying to adapt, to take advantage of what's going on

MARK: *Growing pains.*

FRANK: Many retailers came in as

"My DAREDEVIL editor told me not to

I KNOW, HARRY! I'M SORRY TO BE SUCH A BOTHER, BUT I WAS IN A HURRY! I'LL MAKE IT UP TO YOU WITH THE COMMISSIONER!
YOU'RE SORRY?
PARDON ME! SURPRISE! BUT YOU AIN'T EXACTLY NOTED FOR APOLOGIES!
© 1987 DC Comics Inc.
I KNOW WHAT I'VE BEEN! I'M SORRY! I'M WRONG! I'M WRONG! THE WHOLE TIME EVERY MAJOR MOMENT OR THOSE WEEKS I'VE KNOWN EXACTLY WHAT WAS HAPPENING
WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A CASE OF WHERE LOONIE CLOTHES AND HAIRDO SCORED ABOVE ANYTHING EXCEPT
"SPEED" DEMON
I WAS TRYING TO KILL MYSELF, I GUESS... THE SAME WAY JOHN LENNON KILLED ALAN WELLES AND DAVE WINSTON
IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER TO ME WHETHER THE PEOPLE I WAS SHOOTING AT WERE REALLY OUT OF CONTROL
"HELL, LAST TIME" I'VE HAD EMBARRASSMENT LIKE THIS, I WAS HIDING THE KID FROM THE OVERSEE
SOMETHING SNAPPED HARRY! MAY BOY WASN'T MUCH OLDER THAN MY SON WOULD HAVE BEEN, IF HE HADN'T BEEN KILLED!
COULD DEATH HAVE FACES, TOO? ONLY THOSE I'VE THOUGHT NEED IT?
I DON'T WANT TO DIE, SUNROOF!

Writer Paul Kupperburg commits "blasphemy" in this sequence from VIGILANTE #45, drawn by Tod Smith and Rick Burchett.

people who just love comics the way they have been. All of a sudden they're getting this *mix* of the best and the worst of times. There's work coming out that's not only making tons of money but that really *thrills* people that love comics, brings new people into shops; and with them, all of the problems and misconceptions they bring. All of a sudden the comics shop is no safer from a censor's attack than is a B. Dalton's. But, for all the fear, I don't really think that ultimately *any* of the people involved in this whole debate really want to throw this opportunity away. *(Pause.)* So where's all of this devil's advocate stuff? *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Well, probably a lot of people are wondering about Frank Miller's refusing to work for DC, and not being too interested in working for Marvel. To a certain extent, you can afford to say that, because you can go out and create a DARK KNIGHT or a RONIN and people will probably buy your work. What about a Marv Wolfman, who may be cutting his own throat by biting the hand that feeds him?*

FRANK: It's precisely *because* I can get away with it that I have to take a stand. It's precisely people like me and Alan, who can *afford* to take the stand, *have* to take the stand. I didn't call up some freelancer who's getting his start at DC Comics and ask him to take a stand like this. It wasn't necessary. It's because we're less vulnerable that we can take this stand, of course. As far as Marv goes, I think he's finding out certain ways he's vulnerable, because they're using everything they can against him; at the same time, it seems that every time he goes to a trade show or a comics convention, he's *surrounded* by offers from different publishers.

I think that many of us will find that we needn't have been afraid. In any case, we have to stand by our beliefs. DC's people didn't even believe in the thing to begin with. Just to clarify, DC's ratings system was never presented as a statement of principle; quite the opposite. It wasn't written as a statement of principle; it's plainly in its text, a statement of nothing. It's a device they were going to introduce into their company machinery to service the pressure groups outside —

MARK: *It's a concession.*

FRANK: That's the only reason for a ratings system. It's not to be fair, it's not to provide any sort of protection.

MARK: *What about the movie code? A lot of people say it gives movie makers more freedom, and that if we were to enact something similar for comics, then retailers would know "this is for adults" and so on. Some creators have said it would give them more freedom to do whatever they want, and the the retailer would have the freedom to sell it*

FRANK: It might sound that way. It's hard to argue against any established form of censorship, it's very hard to show you something that never happened, which is really the only argument against it that counts. I know a number of screenwriters. How does a screenwriter describe to me the movie that *almost* happened until they removed one scene of nudity in order to avoid an X and then added three scenes of graphic violence to justify an R? Anything along the way that alters the work, that isn't part of an artist's creative commitment, *damages* the work. I've actually heard people argue that the Comics Code hasn't been an obstacle because "What comics didn't come out because of the Comics Code?" I can't *show* them to you. They couldn't get distributed, so they weren't published, so they weren't written and drawn. But comics stayed boring for a real good reason: The Code had everything to do with it: the short-sightedness of the publishers had everything to do with it; the basic self-contempt of the field had everything to do with it.

MARK: *Do you see a difference between rating and labelling? Like SWAMP THING, "Sophisticated Suspense" — is that censorship, is that ratings, is that labeling?*

FRANK: I don't know *what* it is, it looks kind of like a tag line. I can only tell you that when I see "Adults Only" on the cover of SNARF I don't smell censorship. When I see an issue of VIGILANTE with the word "shit" added in and the word "Mature" on the cover, I smell some sort of corruption of whatever creative process

commit any more 'blasphemy' in scripts."

may possibly have been involved in producing the comic. As far as the difference between labelling and rating, it's been very confusing. DC's ratings system was introduced to me as a ratings system, that's the word that was used by the publisher. Then it quickly became called "standards and practices," then it was "guidelines," then it was "labelling." It all smelled like *fear*, so it didn't look good to me.

If you properly design your book, people will make their own judgements of it. If you do a lousy job, or a dishonest one, no rating system will make it better. The First Amendment is not a gift, it's a weapon in our hands, and it's only as strong as we make it. The difference between labels and ratings are that they are different words often used to describe the same thing. In any case I feel that it's an apology, and I won't work for a publisher who's apologizing. As Alan put it so beautifully, the people who everybody's afraid of are a genuinely evil force and we shouldn't give any ground to them.

MARK: *Nobody admits that they're for censorship, though.*

FRANK: Right.

MARK: *Everybody who you've ever heard on this whole issue begins with the preface, "Now, I'm not for censorship, but..." It's very hard to get somebody to say, "Yeah, I'm for censorship."*

FRANK: The whole trick is to call it something else. Every single person who's been procensorship in this whole thing, they *all* say they're categorically against censorship and then plead their case for the brand of censorship they're selling. Somewhere along the line they compare comics to food. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *In what way?*

FRANK: **Paul Kupperberg** and **John Byrne** and others, spoke out in CBG, arguing that we shouldn't sell vanilla ice cream and calling it strawberry. They'd be right if comics were frozen foods.

Under a rating system, comics would become more predictable — but think of the million little ways stories would be trimmed and bent to fit the system. And the big ways. I could smell this one coming months in advance, when my editor at Marvel called me up to tell me that I wasn't to commit any more "blasphemy" in scripts. I asked him what he meant, and he meant that I used the word "God."

MARK: *Was this DAREDEVIL?*

FRANK: Yeah, it was. I've heard nervous editors at Marvel, at DC, nervous about "blasphemy" if the evangelists are riding high, or saying "the distributors are getting nervous, the retailers are getting nervous" — I've been living with *that* particular pressure in my creative life ever since I started working professionally. I don't want it institutionalized. I don't want *anybody* outside of the people I'm involved with — the publisher, my editor — I don't want anybody on the outside of that to have their fingers in my work.

Look at how ridiculous it's gotten. Everybody was joking about the Comics Code for a number of years there. Up at Marvel we'd pass along the latest tricks on how to circumvent the Code. It was easy to trick. It's **McCarthy**ist rules are largely irrelevant to anything anybody would write in this decade. It wasn't that much of a problem. The one story of mine that was bounced by the Comics Code, we just sent it to them again a few months later, and they approved it. It's an old censorship board that doesn't work real well because it doesn't make a lot of sense. It's on its last legs and it's about time, because it was a bad idea to start with, a white flag thrown up at an enemy that had already turned its back on us. It's due for collapse, we'll probably be rid of it soon. DC proposed something to take its place.

MARK: *A new Comics Code, in other words?*

FRANK: Ultimately, but in '80s terms. You know, don't call it censorship, don't even call it a ratings system, but make sure we're covered just in case somebody out there might be offended. It's hard for me to believe that the same publisher that published WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT would *so quickly* concede to the forces of suppression.

MARK: *But it looks like they've turned around. We don't see any DC ratings code.*

FRANK: It's hard to tell. It seems that for the moment this censorship debate's settling down, but you never know, by the time this sees print there might be a whole new panic on. Somebody like **Ed Meese** might talk about us in his sleep and send publishers and retailers running screaming to the hills again. But for now things seem to have died down. This is the stage to learn from what's happened. This lit-

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SUDDENLY...
REBEL ENFORCER!
I CAN'T FIRE AT THE DRIVER... IT MIGHT BE RITA!
RITA...
WHAT DO I SAY TO A SISTER I'VE NEVER KNOWN?
THAT ROBOTIC BITCH COULD RUIN ALL OF OUR PLANS!
IF MY CONTROLS STILL WORK...!
EYHIAGH!
CAN'T LET LUCANE KNOW HOW MUCH IT HURTS...!
SHE'D WANT ME TO QUIT!

BEFORE THERE WAS **ROBOCOP**™ THERE WAS

MICRA™

MIND CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON

"It reads like a movie. I think the story's terrific! Excelsior!"
STAN LEE

SPECIAL PROMO #6 will be previewed to 15,000 readers in the Comics Buyer's Guide just as it hits the stores!

MICRA #6 features "A New Beginning," which places America's most beautiful robotic warrior in an exciting — and dangerous — new role. It has a stunning full-color cover painting by Ted Boonthanakit, whose interior art is more detailed than ever! Lamar Waldron's full-length story is introduced by an illustrated recap, making this a great place for new readers to start the series.

COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"Dave Gibbons and I are working on a series."

tle bout we've had should teach us a lot about what's wrong with our industry.

MARK: *When your booklet is finished and when the censorship stuff we're going through now dissipates, what kind of stuff are you going to get back to doing? What can we hope to see from Frank miller?*

FRANK: In my spare time, late at night, I've been filling my notebooks, I've got a bunch of new stories.

MARK: *Creating entirely new series and characters?*

FRANK: It's original material. Graphic Novels.

MARK: *Are you going to be doing some writing for other artists.*

FRANK: Oh, yeah. **Dave Gibbons** and I are working on a new series. Bill and I have *got* to work together again. We had such a good time and I've got the story. Working with Bill forced me to reinterpret my whole way of writing comics. Collaboration is thrilling. It's such a give and take, back and forth. **Lynn Varley** and I are illustrating the covers to LONE WOLF, and we're well along on the ELEKTRA graphic novel.

MARK: *Are you going to be drawing?*

FRANK: Oh, yeah. I'm sort of gearing up. This past year was quite a bit of work and it left me very exhausted. Now I'm finding after a break I'm champing at the bit to get back to it.

MARK: *So — let's put this into a cycle — you cut your teeth working on company characters, then you moved away and you created RONIN. Then you learned a lot of things from RONIN that you brought back into DARK KNIGHT and DARE-DEVIL and other projects. What might be the next step in the cycle?*

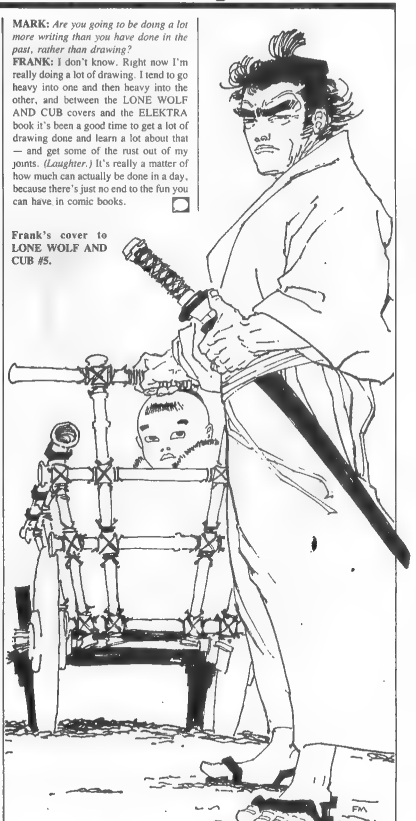
FRANK: I'm not saying I'll never touch any of the old characters again — it's a stupid thing to predict too far into the future — but right now I feel like the luckiest man in the world; I've got the opportunity that every artist dreams of: I can create freely. It's just wonderful! As long as I have this freedom I'm going to use it. It seems that every couple of years I go through this kind of cycle of work, I come out of it and I feel like I'm earlier in my career than I ever was before because the possibilities have tripled each time.

MARK: *Are you going to stick to superheroes?*

FRANK: No. I've got a variety of different things in mind. Some of the stuff is superheroic, but that's not a condition anymore. Comics is a story-form, not a genre. I love superheroes, but that isn't the only thing you can do with a story.

MARK: *Are you going to be doing a lot more writing than you have done in the past, rather than drawing?*

FRANK: I don't know. Right now I'm really doing a lot of drawing. I tend to go heavy into one and then heavy into the other, and between the LONE WOLF AND CUB covers and the ELEKTRA book it's been a good time to get a lot of drawing done and learn a lot about that — and get some of the rust out of my joints. *(Laughter.)* It's really a matter of how much can actually be done in a day, because there's just no end to the fun you can have in comic books.



Frank's cover to LONE WOLF AND CUB #5.

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"I understand in America comics are still

KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

Frank Miller's cover letter — sent along with his questions to LONE WOLF/KOZURE OKAMI writer Kazuo Koike and artist Goseki Kojima — makes the best introduction to this very exclusive interview (needless to say, Frank draws the covers and writes forwards for the American edition of LONE WOLF):

"Dear Sirs,

I'm informed by COMICS INTERVIEW magazine that you have agreed to your first interview for an American comics magazine. As an admirer of your masterful work, KOZURE OKAMI, I am honored to have the opportunity to prepare the following list of questions for you.

While KOZURE OKAMI has quickly attracted a strong following in America, very little is known to U.S. comics readers and professionals about Japanese comics. Please be patient with the questions about the general shape of comics sales and business practices. They are included because I believe American comics artists, in particular, will find your answers not only enlightening but inspiring. Our history in these areas is a sorry one, only recently showing signs of improvement. Your example could help in the movement toward further advancing the rights

All art accompanying this interview is © 1987 First Comics, Inc. & Global Communications Corp

looked upon as children's entertainment."

...] cartoonists and the progress of this wonderful artform itself.

Thank you again for your attention to this interview, and most particularly and emphatically, thank you for KOZURE OKAMI.

— Frank Miller''

This interview must set some kind of precedent for international speed, communications and cooperation. Frank's questions went via Federal Express to First Comics, where they were telexed to Global Communications in Tokyo and translated for Mr. Koike and Mr. Kojima, whose answers were translated from Japanese into English and telexed back to First Comics. Alex Wald provided annotations, and copies were then sent, again via Federal Express, to DAVID A. KRAFT for final editing. Kudos are due all parties involved.

Considering the communications obstacles posed by language and cultural differences, something is inevitably lost in the translation, but where editing for communication was necessary, care has been taken to capture the intended meaning.

FRANK MILLER: *American comics readers have only recently been treated to English language translations of Japanese comics. Their reaction has been, to say the least, enthusiastic, most particularly to your LONE WOLF AND CUB, which has surpassed most American comics in sales and critical success. What might startle American readers is the extent of LONE WOLF's success in Japan.*

I've heard conflicting reports as to the number of editions of LONE WOLF that have seen print, and as to the number of copies sold. All have far exceeded the sales of any American comic book in history. Could you please clarify, for us, exactly how many millions have been sold in Japan?

KAZUO KOIKE: I should say it's about 8 million copies sold in Japan. What I mean to say is, at the least. Because, in Japan, there is a tendency to quote less for the tax reason. It is often misjudged by believing "public figures" released by each publisher, which are sometimes more and sometimes less than the actual.

I must point out LOAN WOLF AND CUB had been periodically published, one episode each, in the magazine — which had a weekly readership circulation of 1 million to 2 million. Almost simultaneously, the book format was published first in 28 volumes and second in 14 volumes (both contents were same). This is very typical in the case of Japanese comics, but characteristically, it's completely different from American comics. That's why I can only talk about the book format readership.

FRANK: *Given such staggering numbers, Japanese comics must sell to readers of every age. While visiting Japan, I saw men and women of every age and economic class reading comic books. It's clear that the people of your country have accepted comics as a worthy part of your popular culture. Has this always been the case? And, if not, was there a particular time when comics came to be so widely accepted?*

KOIKE: We, our generation of comics people, made the changes. I understand in America, comics are still being looked upon as children's entertainment. But, our generation does not think comics different

"I hated his script. So I started to insert

from TV, radio or newspaper media. It's fine to accept comics as a media, equal to television, as a part of general entertainment. In Japan, comics surpassed television media power, at least in the effectiveness of longevity of story in mass culture. The comics is the number one medium in Japan now. That's why Japan has more variety of genre in comics — not just hero types. That's why they attract the general audience.

FRANK: *One of the main obstacles, in America, to getting comics accepted as more than just children's entertainment has been the attitude held by many Americans, that heroes must provide models of proper social conduct for children. Is this attitude prevalent in Japan?*

KOIKE: In Japan, the public treats comics just like TV. In America or Japan, I believe, the middle age group or working class's only leasure, when they get back home, is to watch television. You should think of comics as a part of daily commodity, not anything special from other media. Of course, TV has certain moral codes which should not be imposed any differently on comics. As TV is in every home, comics should be there, too.

FRANK: *What, if any, forms of censorship are imposed on Japanese comics? One of the many joys of reading LONE WOLF is how pure and direct it is in portraying its story. Did you and Mr. Kojima find yourselves, at any point, required to delete or alter your story? I ask this because censorship has become an increasing problem for American comics artists recently.*

KOIKE: Yes, there was censorship in Japan, as well. Every one of us, at that time, was bearing with hardship and poorness. A lot of genius was born at that time. We had to fight back such censorship with our own efforts.

FRANK: *I understand that LONE WOLF is based on genuine Japanese history. I've even been told that a wooden babycart loaded with weapons exists in a Japanese museum. Please explain how and when you created LONE WOLF, and where it fits in your country's history. Was there a Yagyu clan? Was there an Ogami-Ito?*

KOIKE: In the movie, we had many examples of artifacts, including a babycart — but not in the museum. Yagyu existed in history, but everything else is a fiction. The time was particularly set in the Tokugawa 4th generation of Shogun called the Ietsuna Era. I trust all the historical backgrounds were accurate.

FRANK: *Every segment of LONE WOLF seems to offer more insight into bushido. I realize that, as exotic as bushido is to Western eyes, it is an essential element of Japanese history and though, one as familiar to your people as it is unfamiliar to mine. Even so, your ability to translate its concepts, to make them so easily understood, is extraordinary, and has been enlightening to me. Is this the result simply of your talent, or are you particularly schooled in this subject?*

KOIKE: I hold 4th degree of Kendo. I practice archery, as well. I was born to the family of Bushido tradition. So, it was natural for me to understand Hagakure Bushido, based on the idea of Buddhism and Confucianism. Bushido is in the center of Buddhism and Confucianism, nothing can be a part. [Buddhism and Confucianism are an integral element of Bushido. Bushido — Way of the Warrior.]

FRANK: *Very recently, in America, schools teaching comics art have begun to appear, and classes on comics are beginning to be taught at American universities. But these are very new, and the vast majority of American comics artists have learned the craft only by studying existing work, and, of course, the related fields of film, literature, and illustration. Do schools for comics exist in Japan? And, if they do, how long have they existed?*

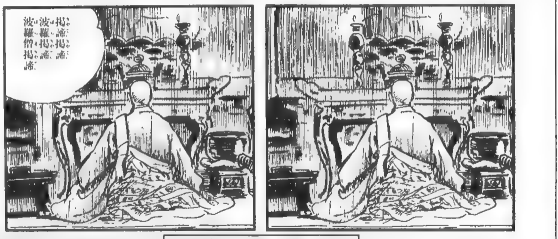
KOIKE: My school *Gekiga-sonjuku* graduates dominate the Japanese comics now. However, you can't teach comics. Don't make a mistake on that point.

You have to pull one's talent out, that's all. If you teach, you are just imposing your style on a person. In my school, we help a person to recognize his own talent, what he is the best at. If you are good for writing, then please become a novelist. If you are good for TV, choose another way. In the last 12 years of my educational experiences, I saw a hundred students graduating to a variety of professions — not just in comics. It's not a school to teach how to draw comics or face.

FRANK: *Your artwork is an inspiration to me, and through it I have become exposed to some of the wealth of Japanese art. Could you name which artists of your own country have affected you most deeply, and which influenced the development of your style?*

GOSEKI KOJIMA: I like *suiboku-ga* (ink & water painting). I started to draw pictures at a very early age, but my most influenced Japanese art is by **Mr. Gyokudo Kawai**. I dislike *suiboku-ga* ar-

Some behind-the-scenes effort involved in importing Japan's biggest comic. First Comics' artist Paul Guinan says "Sometimes we need to change the balloon positioning — and there will be a giant hole left in the artwork, which we'll have to fill in. In issue #3 a Buddhist monk is chanting a prayer that was too complex to translate properly, to give it justice, so it was left out, and I had to refinish his shrine in the style of the original artist."



some nonsense, releasing the tension."

An example of how Japanese sound effects do, or don't, translate.

tists who draw with their own emotion, or try to state what is the nature. The real plum-blossom flower is beautiful in nature. You will only try it to transform in ink and brush.

I like the movies a lot. I enjoy drawing pictures from what I saw in the movies when I was child. I did most all that has to do with ink and brush, including being a billboard artist — all sorts of different work in order to live. There was nothing — no entertainment — right after the war. I produced and painted paper board-picture-theatre on bicycle for children for nearly 10 years. [**Mr. Kojima** refers to the *kami-shibai* or "paper plays" that were popular in Japan before the rise of the modern *Magna*. *Kami-shibai* usually featured a series of large painted cards that could be changed in sequence, held by a slotted frame. The artist would also narrate the pictures. This was an outdoor, traveling entertainment, able to setup on any street corner, hence the bicycle.] Then, after that, I got involved with comics. It was about 1957.

FRANK: *Did any Western artists contribute to your approach?*

KOJIMA: I don't fit into particularly any western art. I think movies are the highest form of western art. THE THIRD MAN was one early picture I liked most. I even became a projectionist and billboard artist for a small theatre. I learned how to draw there, too. I was in such poverty, but everything was so enjoyable I never felt hard about it.

FRANK: *LONE WOLF is such an overwhelmingly visual experience that I've often wondered how exactly you collaborated with* **Mr. Koike?** *So many of the best moments of the story are wordless. What form did Mr. Koike use when writing the story? Did he describe the content of each panel, or describe the action as one would in a screenplay, leaving its adaptation to panels up to Mr. Kojima?*

KOIKE: Mr. Kojima and I are very close friends. We worked together. I wrote the story of LONE WOLF AND CUB and influenced the composition of frames — otherwise, he would have continued the box style of comics.

KOJIMA: Oh, I hated his script. He tried to give me a lot of words for the characters. So I started to insert some nonsense — Daigoro's expressions — releasing the tension of the story. That's seemed to get so popular. It's worked, I think. He gave me freedom and I appreciated it. If **Mr. Koike** is the writer, I am the movie director and cast. You have to be very flexible in order to take such a role. I think that's come from my nature. I always say, you have to create a drama — even when you draw a tree or a stone.

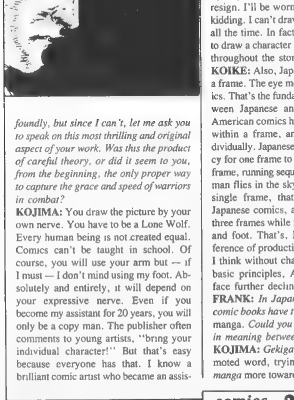
Mr. Sanpei Shirato highly regarded my drawings, and I drew all the pictures in KAMUI. "Kamui- Gaiden" is copied from my previous style. [**Mr. Kojima** is saying here that he was the original artist on the first KAMUI series authored by **Sanpei Shirato**. The subsequent Kamui series — there are several — are drawn in "**Kojima**-style."] "Yagyu-Ninja" or "Nuke-nin" are also terminology I collaborated to create for **Mr. Shirato**. I enjoyed the work with him, too.

FRANK: *What struck me first about your artwork on LONE WOLF was the combat scenes, so full of motion and power. You seem to break the figures into streaks, emphasizing movement over the careful description of form. I wish I could sit with you and talk about this in person, since among the many virtues of your work, it is the one that has affected me most pro-*

"I draw alone at the edge, fearing some

I SHALL ESCAPE TO WREAK VENGEANCE AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE SLANDERED OUR FAMILY NAME! I WILL CAST ASIDE THE OFFICE OF EXECUTIONER..
..AND BECOME A A LOST SOUL TRAVELLING AMONG DEMONS!

LISTEN WELL, DAIGORO! FROM NOW ON YOUR BROTHER FOLLOWS THE ROAD OF BLOOD AND DEATH, OF SLAUGHTER WITHOUT MERCY...
THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD!



foundly, but since I can't, let me ask you to speak on this most thrilling and original aspect of your work. Was this the product of careful theory, or did it seem to you, from the beginning, the only proper way to capture the grace and speed of warriors in combat?

KOJIMA: You draw the picture by your own nerve. You have to be a Lone Wolf. Every human being is not created equal. Comics can't be taught in school. Of course, you will use your arm but — if I must — I don't mind using my foot. Absolutely and entirely, it will depend on your expressive nerve. Even if you become my assistant for 20 years, you will only be a copy man. The publisher often comments to young artists, "bring your individual character!" But that's easy because everyone has that. I know a brilliant comic artist who became an assistant to a famous artist, and now the master gives him a direction and everyone else copies from this chief assistant. The creativity stops right there, all the pictures start to level off the same.

In my case, I draw alone at the edge, fearing someone, some day, will surpass me. So, naturally my drawing has a tendency for the growth momentum. If I ever wear down, the pictures will become dull and low tone. Even my publisher will try to pursue me — it will be my time to resign. I'll be worn out. So you must be kidding. I can't draw the picture the same all the time. In fact, my problem is how to draw a character continuously the same throughout the story!

KOIKE: Also, Japanese comics move in a frame. The eye moves in Japanese comics. That's the fundamental difference between Japanese and American comics. American comics have a tendency to stay within a frame, and a frame stands individually. Japanese comics have a tendency for one frame to interfere with the next frame, running sequencially. When Superman flies in the sky, if it's drawn in one single frame, that's a still picture. In Japanese comics, a character will fly in three frames while focused on head, body and foot. That's, I should say, the difference of production point-of-view, and I think without changing such a view of basic principles, American comics will face further decline

FRANK: *In Japan, as I understand it, comic books have two names:* gekiga *and* manga. *Could you explain the difference in meaning between the two?*

KOJIMA: *Gekiga* was **Mr. Saito**'s promoted word, trying to distinguish from *manga* more toward children. But, I don't really care. You can name mine anything.

FRANK: *American comics artists have mostly been subject to conditions of menial servitude to their publishers, up until very recently, and even now few comics artists are allowed to own the copyrights to their work. Generally, American comics artists are paid very little and treated like factory workers.*

KOJIMA: Is that so? It's just sounds like Japan 30 years ago. If you can't earn a living by drawing comics, do something else. I tried everything for a living — and that's taught me more about how to draw comics. Don't be aggrieved about it. You have to be curious.

KOIKE: In Japan, before our generation rose in the comics world, it was just like in America. We have only experienced it 25 years earlier. We have a history of revolutionizing — moving comics, changing regulations — and made comics grow as a major mass media in Japan.

FRANK: *I've noticed, in Japanese editions of LONE WOLF, your beautiful watercolor work on covers and illustration. But your comics work itself, what I have been fortunate enough to see of it, has been done exclusively in black and white, as are almost all Japanese comic books. It's well known that Japanese printers are among the best in the world, and that Japanese magazines and books feature beautiful color reproduction, so I've been surprised at how few Japanese comics employ painted color.*

KOJIMA: Because Japanese color printing is expensive. But, I like black and white. Even movies, too — the color of movies is artificial. I was so shocked to see a classic film recently on TV in color.

FRANK: *I've heard that colored comics*

one, some day, will surpass me."

are considered a corruption of the artform by some Japanese cartoonists. Is this the case? I ask this, mainly, because I've found working with Lynn Varley has made me feel that painted color can greatly expand the capabilities of the form. I'm eager to hear what you have to say about this

KOJIMA: When requested to put color in my drawings, I don't mind doing it — it becomes more erotic.

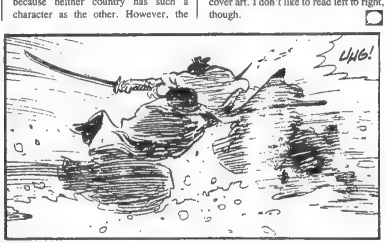
FRANK: *What other works have you produced, together and separately, and what chance do we have of seeing them in America?*

KOIKE: SPRING HAS COME might be popular in America. Because it's about retired Samuri couple and good for the senior age group. Also, HANZO-NO-MON and many others can be available forever, as long as you like our comics. As we in Japan enjoy the character of Dirty Harry or Beverly Hills Cops, Americans enjoy the character of Ogami-Itto, because neither country has such a character as the other. However, the character of Kamui was not strongly based on Japanese or Eastern ideas of Buddhism — it's just violence in a Western style. You have to have a strong identity, with backbone of culture, to be successful in the different culture.

FRANK: *Are you happy with the presentation of LONE WOLF in its American edition?*

KOIKE: Yes, I think it's very well done.

KOJIMA: Oh, I love it — especially the cover art. I don't like to read left to right, though.



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X-THIEVES™ #6

by Henry Vogel & Mark Propst

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"I was First's first employee."

RICK OLIVER

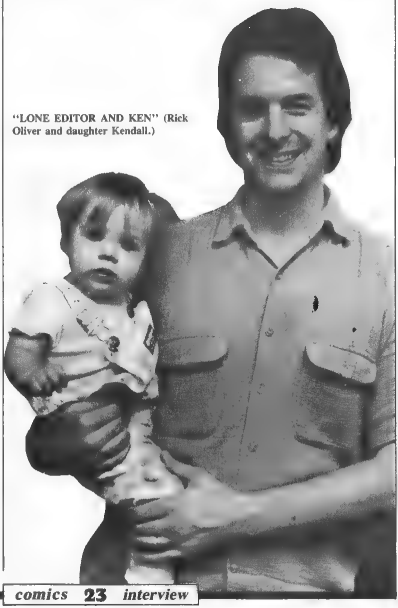
Rick Oliver is one of those guys who loves to talk and does it well. He does it loud, too, but my ears survived, and apparently so did my recorder. He's our escort here and will take us behind the scenes at First Comics and give us all the juicy details about the handling of LONE WOLF AND CUB...

DARREL L. BOATZ: *To start off, let's get a little autobiographical statement — how did you reach First Comics and all the greatness?*

RICK OLIVER: I came to comics by way of **Mike Gold,** of all people. **Mike Gold** actually brought me into the comics business back when First Comics was starting up in 1982. I was working as an advertising copywriter, and I had also worked briefly on a short-lived magazine called VIDEO ACTION, as an editor working with Mike. So when Mike started up First Comics with **Rick Obadiah** he just kind of asked me if I would be interested in joining up, and I said, "Sure, what the hell, it's gotta be more fun than writing advertising copy." *(Laughter.)* And the rest is history. When Mike went to DC two years ago I took over his position. I was the first employee of First Comics. I was an employee before they had offices. We used to have editorial meetings in my apartment and I wrote up the minutes on my own letterhead.

DARREL: *How did First Comics go about acquiring LONE WOLF AND CUB?*

RICK: Well, they found us, as a matter of fact. At the American Booksellers Association convention, two years ago in New Orleans, I was manning the booth with **Kurt Goldzung,** our newly acquired sales director at that point — **Rick Obadiah** was off cutting great deals, which is what Rick does best — when **Bud Plant** — Bud gets a lot of credit here — brought these two Japanese guys over, **Akira Okada**and **Masa Mikage,** the two principals of Global Communications. They had apparently gone to several distributors asking about who they should approach in terms of U.S. publishing rights for LONE WOLF AND CUB, and pretty much everybody recommended First if they wanted the best *quality* they could get. Bud made a point of saying, "Not only do you want First but I will walk you over to First." And Bud got up from his own booth and physically walked these two guys over to our booth, where he introduced them to me. They had this special translated version of the first couple of episodes of LONE WOLF AND CUB that they had made up just for the A.B.A. convention, because they were



"LONE EDITOR AND KEN" (Rick Oliver and daughter Kendall.)

"Samurai were always right-hand-

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trying to find a publisher, and they wanted to know if we would be *remotely interested* in publishing this. Before I could say anything, Kurt said, "LONE WOLF AND CUB, of course we would be interested! Everybody knows that it was a major influence on **Frank Miller!**"

In point of fact, a lot of people that work at First are very much into Japanese comics. **Alex Ward,** our art director, buys a lot of Japanese comics and reads Japanese, which is why he essentially redrafts the translations. Once we get them from Japan, they go right to Alex and he turns them into real English. So that's pretty much how it happened. I was just kind of standing around and these two guys came up and asked if we'd like to publish this book. Kurt said of course we'd like to publish it and I said, "Well, gee, I guess so." *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Had you been familiar at all with the work prior to that?*

RICK: Yes.

DARREL: *You had seen the work in the original form I assume —*

RICK: Yes.

DARREL: *How does that compare with First's editions?*

RICK: The originals? Well, they read right to left so they are a complete opposite of ours. *(Laughter.)* We have gone to great lengths to maintain the integrity of the product while still making it accessible to the American market. Let me explain. **Kolke** and **Kojima,** when they created LONE WOLF AND CUB, were very concerned about historical accuracy. Well, then you talk about historical accuracy in terms of the samurai there are certain do's and don'ts. Samurai were always right-handed, they were never left-handed. There was a certain way they folded their robes. So **Kolke** and **Kojima** were very concerned that the book simply not be just flopping the film and printing it backwards. They took it upon themselves, at **Kolke's** studio, Studio Ship, to go through the laborious process of going and reflopping individual panels within the flopped film, to make the swordsmen appear correct, to make the robes appear correct, things of that nature. It's quite an *intensive* process.

So yes, there are some differences in that it isn't just a straight flopping of the artwork and reading it backwards. It's funny because if **Alex Wald** had his way — he's very much a purist about things Japanese — we would print the books the same way the Japanese do; we would just run an English translation and instruct people to read backwards, which is kind of an interesting notion and maybe someday we'll do that.

DARREL: *Yeah, that would be interesting, an interesting product to put on the market.*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Rick Oliver
Born: That's privileged information
Residence: Evanston, IL
Occupation: Editorial Director, First Comics
Credits: I have a Mastercard and a Visa.
Education: Yes
Favorite Artist: Steve Rude
Favorite Childhood Comic Book: Steve Ditko's DR. STRANGE

RICK: When we started out with LONE WOLF AND CUB it was with a concerted effort to reach as many people as possible in the American audience, and with that in mind we wanted to make it as attractive a product as possible. The reason it's considerably *longer* than an American comic book is because Japanese storytelling is a *lot* different than storytelling in American comic books. They'll have a single page devoted to a guy walking out of a room. Japanese comic readers spend a couple of seconds on each page that they read, they read them very quickly, and a typical Japanese comic book is 400 or 500 pages long.

But we wanted to have a package that we could put at an affordable price. We didn't want to put off people with a very high ticket price, so we figured we wanted to do it for under $2.00 and then we figured out what was the maximum amount of pages that we could do for that amount of money. And as luck would have it, most of the episodes, because they were originally serialized in one of the Japanese weekly comics, ran in the 60-page range, so we could put it nice and neatly into a 64-page package. In the long run, we plan to expand it to 128 pages and do two episodes per installment.

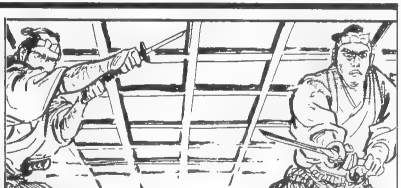
DARREL: *Now, LONE WOLF is in the perfect-bound format. . .*

RICK: Well, all of our graphic novels have been perfect bound.

DARREL: *Right, but this is the first series to come out, why was that choice made?*

RICK: It was packaging. It had to do with providing an attractive package for the American market. Because we felt at the time that we brought it out that LONE WOLF AND CUB was *significantly* different from your average American comic

ed, they were never left-handed."



book — it was also a black-and-white comic book at a time when black-and-white comics books were getting a bad name — we wanted to make the outside package as attractive as possible. Hence, we hired the best person we could think of to do the covers, **Frank Miller**, and we put a nice heavy stock on the cover, so you really feel that you're getting something good for your money, which you are. But we wanted the outside package to attract as many casual readers as possible. We knew we were going to get, sure, the die-hard **Frank Miller** fans were going to buy it for **Frank Miller**'s work, but we wanted it to appeal to a much wider audience.

I can't sit here and tell you that there is some artistic reason why it's perfect bound — there isn't. There is a certain aesthetic to it, *it looks* nicer, but beyond that the main reason was just to make it a nicer package — to get people to pick this up and say, "Well, for $1.95 I can't lose, I'm gonna buy this and see what it is." And I think that people bought the first issue *because* it looked like such a nice package, and they have continued to buy it because the story is very gripping. We just wanted to get people to *look* at it, give it a chance. It's kind of a form of advertising that says: "Look at me, pick me up!"

DARREL: *In a sense, you're saying this is worth this package so maybe you should be interested in it.*

RICK: That's right, and it paid off. Indeed the others went up in subsequent issues.

DARREL: *What are the sales figures on LONE WOLF AND CUB?*

RICK: A *billion* copies a week. *(Laughter.)* Last time I checked we were doing just over 100,000 copies an issue, and I don't even know what the final figures are on issue #1, but we've done three printings and we're debating a fourth. We're well *over* 150,000 at the end of the third printing. These are all tentative figures because we keep reprinting, we reprinted issue #2 and we're debating reprinting issue #3's, and so on and so on — so the book is going very strong. It's selling better than anything we've ever published.

DARREL: *Another thing, had you ever given any thought to coloring the book?*

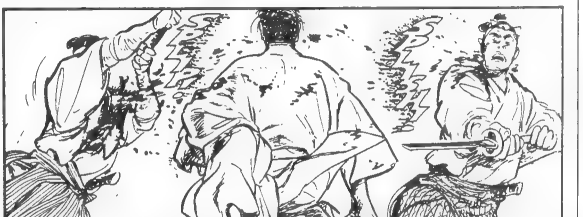
RICK: For about an hour. *(Laughter.)* We sat down with the artwork and looked at it and decided in the end that this stuff would not really lend itself well to color. It would really be akin to colorization I guess I should quickly rescind that comment, because we do color versions of the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES books, but they easily lend themselves to that and we take care in doing that because, of course, **Eastman** and **Laird** are really concerned about that and want it to be the best product it could be. But **Goseki Kojima**'s style of art doesn't really lend itself to color, so we decided ultimately not to add color. We debated it for about an hour and decided it really wasn't a good idea. Actually, we were talking about it in terms of how to reach the maximum number of American readers. What should we do? Of course, we'll do it in color, is the first thing you're going to say. And, as I said, at the time we brought out the book there was an *immense* black-and-white implosion.

DARREL: *And that's why I was wondering, because it came out right when all of the black-and-whites were hurting. But it's not treated like a black-and-white book by the market.*

RICK: And I think that's good. I don't think any book should be treated as a black-and-white book or a color book. They should be treated on their merits — does a property warrant your attention. My own personal preference is for really good art done in black and white, unless it's painted. That's just personal preference, though, and I like all of our color books. I think that the colorists we work with are quite exceptional and they do great work. But the stuff I collect is primarily black-and-white. It's also really old. *(Laughter.)* I collect **Walt Kelly** and things of that nature.

DARREL: *Why did LONE WOLF get received differently?*

RICK: What happened with LONE



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by Henry Vogel

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"Frank Miller's name sells comics."

WOLF was it got treated as something *we* didn't expect, everybody referred to it as a graphic novel. And it's kind of funny because, as **Frank Miller** says, *it is* a graphic novel, it just happens to span 28 volumes and 9,000 pages.

DARREL: *And Frank Miller is doing the introductions and the covers. How did that come about?*

RICK: It was very simple, we called him up and said, "Hi, Frank, we're going to be reprinting LONE WOLF AND CUB, how would you like to do covers and the introductions?" And he said, "Of course." I mean **Frank Miller** has made no secret that this is one of his favorite comic books of all time and that he has been heavily influenced by it.

DARREL: *Yeah, what I've heard is that LONE WOLF AND CUB was largely responsible for inspiring him to do RONIN.*

RICK: I have heard that, too, but you'd have to ask Frank, ultimately, if that's true or not. But certainly you can see the influence in his style on DAREDEVIL, in terms of his storytelling techniques.

DARREL: *What sort of export rights does First have with LONE WOLF?*

RICK: My understanding is that our deal with Global Communications is we will act as the agent to represent the property in all countries outside of Japan.

DARREL: *I was wondering, because it occurs to me that you guys probably wouldn't be doing all of the work you do flipping these pages over if there was a version already in existence reading left to right.*

RICK: This is true. This is all there is. Nobody else has done it outside of Japan.

DARREL: *So possibly somebody in Switzerland or someplace could want to publish LONE WOLF AND CUB, where they're thinking of publishing the First Comics editions in Swiss or whatever?*

RICK: Exactly.

DARREL: *So if they do that, just a businesslike question here, does First get any money?*

RICK: *(Laughter.)* Well, I certainly hope so, since we did all of the work. The answer is yes. In the vaguest of terms, we have a shared deal with the Japanese, anything that we do we split with them.

DARREL: *And that would extend to exporting this material?*

RICK: You bet. And I think there's already been some interest in the European market for doing that.

DARREL: *Well, exporting just the First Comics editions, in American English —*

RICK: We already do that.

DARREL: *Yeah, I'm sure you get them to Canada, Britain, anywhere else you can, but are they reading them in Japan?*

RICK: You know, I don't know. I have wondered about that. But we're not sending it over there, certainly, except to Global Communications and to **Koike** and **Kojima.** We're not actually *selling* the books in Japan. It would be difficult to picture that there would be much of a market for it, seeing as how they already have it in their native tongue. It's kind of like wondering if there's a market in America for American films translated into foreign languages.

DARREL: *That's true, but I always wonder how well they do that. Sometimes, not with everything, but I'd like to see how well they're doing that. Of course, I don't speak foreign languages so I couldn't watch these films.*

RICK: *(Laughter.)* So it would all be lost on you, right.

DARREL: *I'd have to rely on somebody to tell me, "Oh, they did a good job." Well, as you stated, the book has become real popular here in America . . . why do you think it has been so successful here?*

RICK: Well, to give credit where credit is due, the initial success, the initial interest in the book, undoubtedly came from the involvement of **Frank Miller. Frank Miller** is a name that sells comic books. Unquestionably, the first issue sold much better than we had originally anticipated, in terms of the first print run of the first issue, because **Frank Miller**'s name was involved in the project; he was doing the covers and the introductions, and everybody *knew* that this was a book that had influenced **Frank Miller.** In terms of the sudden demand for the book beyond that — I mean, we're debating a fourth printing of the first issue, we've sold out three printings — beyond the first printing of the first issue it has been the story! It's a very gripping and well told story. People may have originally thought, "Hey, **Frank Miller** likes it, maybe I should take a look at it," but they have continued to buy it because it's a good story. It's a well told story. I really think it's that simple.

L.W.&C. #1 cover illo by Frank Miller.

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"Lettering is the low end of the scale."

Photos: Willie Schubert

Creativity is the focal obligation of comics work; this is true even for those whose work generally goes unnoticed. Lettering, while obviously present in the final product, falls into that category . . .

DARREL L. BOATZ: *How did you become a letterer?*

WILLIE SCHUBERT: I started submitting some material, mainly to First Comics because I lived not too far from their old offices. I pestered them with samples. They said they were generally not quite good enough but the lettering showed some promise. Eventually, a few other people and I put together a series proposal and presented it to First Comics. They didn't take the proposal but they liked the lettering, so they gave me the lettering assignment on STARSLAYER at that point. The first issue was kind of strange but eventually I got the hang of that. My lettering went through several changes as I learned the job a little better. Getting it done once for a proposal and doing the job day in and day out is a completely different way of working.

DARREL: *How so?*

WILLIE: Well, it's almost a variation on doing factory work. When you talk about creative input, lettering is on the low end of the scale. The biggest part of it is basically mass production of calligraphy. You try to make everything fit, but what you get done today doesn't really make a whole lot of difference, tomorrow you have to come back and do it again. It tends for me to be a fairly long day.

DARREL: *Would there be a tendency . . . to maybe be daydreaming?*

WILLIE: Yeah, after awhile. After you get to a certain point your mind does have the ability to wander a little bit, but not a great deal. Certain parts of the job become mindless, ruling up pages, even some of the lettering. One of the things I discovered when I first started. I was trading pages back and forth with **Hilary Barta,** and working for monthly comics became the objective. You think in terms of doing it close enough for comics, sort of like close enough for jazz; do what you can get done. You get to the point where you can do the job in the time allotted and you go on from there — and I think I've lost track of the question. *(Laughter.)*

WILLIE SCHUBERT

"I sweat the sound effects a lot more

Compare Willie's f/x lettering from AMERICAN FLAGG, (above), to LONE WOLF, (opposite). In the FLAGG example, the lettering takes the place of the conventional panel border.

DARREL: *Do you have any personal favorite letterers that you maybe try to emulate?*

WILLIE: Yeah. At first I looked at **Bruzenak** a great deal. I find myself looking at **Tom Orzechowski** a lot, his sound effects are pretty good. They're a little looser than what I do. Those are the ones I look at more than anyone else

DARREL: *Well, you are the letterer on LONE WOLF AND CUB, how did you get such a plum assignment?*

WILLIE: Alex Wald mentioned the job and asked if I'd be interested in doing it. Global had produced a promotional book in English, some of the material from LONE WOLF AND CUB, so I looked at it. It was different than anything else I was working on. I was working on AMERICAN FLAGG and DREADSTAR and BADGER, and this was *completely* different, so I dropped AMERICAN FLAGG to pick up LONE WOLF AND CUB. I think one of the things in my favor is I am local and I drop in the office fairly frequently. Did I mention the bribe? *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Did you have a lot of meetings over at First when the assignment first came up?*

WILLIE: Not so much meetings as working out a procedure for working, because Global supplies First with artwork that is actually *smaller* than the final printed version and there was no way I could possibly letter that small. We worked out a system where I work on an overlay that they then Xerox and paste up, so basically finding a size that we could both be happy with was the biggest problem. Some things that I started doing at the very first I have continued to do, but it goes back and forth. I think by the third one I was actually satisfied with the way it was turning out, the way my end of the job was turning out.

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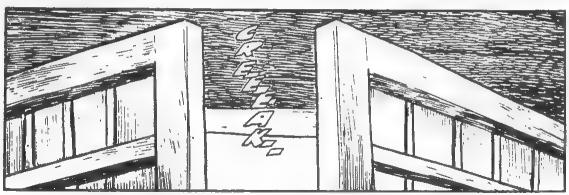
on this than on anything else."



But I still have moments when I think, "Why did I do *that?*" Or I'll wish I'd had time to do something better.

DARREL: *That's the curse of producing material on a tight schedule, everybody has those kind of moments.*

WILLIE: Right.

DARREL: *Do you do anything special in the lettering for LONE WOLF?*

WILLIE: I find myself sweating the sound effects a lot more on this than on anything else. With BADGER I reached a point where I had a shtick that I pretty much relied on rather than having to keep inventing new things, although there were embellishments. For some reason I keep finding myself wanting to do some things different in every issue of LONE WOLF. There are limits to how far that will go, but I find this a little harder to do. I find myself stretching a little more. The sound effects have kind of evolved as we go. It's also a little looser. There's a little more flexibility on this than on other books because I don't have the problem of everything getting colored. In color books you're at the mercy of the colorist, they're responsible for what stands out on the page or not because of how they balance the colors. In black-and-white that responsibility comes down to me, as far as how well the sound effects stand out or merge into the panels and so on. That helps a little bit. At the same time there are problems in dealing with the wide range of tones on everything. That made me tend to stay with solid blacks or fairly open letters Every now and then I'll throw some tone into something, but very rarely. I've found that I worry about the outlines on the letters more than anything else.

DARREL: *Well, a lot of work goes into the sound effects on this book. Because of the way it originates in Japan, the sound effects can't be reproduced here?*

WILLIE: Oh, yeah. Well, it is a little difficult because things that read in the original artwork as a symbol or a couple of symbols which are integrated into the drawings, they turn into six or seven letters in English sometimes and that becomes real difficult to integrate in the same way. I find that sort of conflict to be the problem. I think most times I've managed to solve it fairly well, though I've seen stuff after it's printed that make me *wince* a little bit. *(Laughter.)* Our sound effects seem to be clumsier than the Japanese sound effects, and I think maybe there's no way around that. Of course, their sound effects are worked into the art and that requires a fair amount of retouching most times, especially when they're halftone. That's a different problem in the production end. This book is actually for me just a touch simpler, or at least that particular part is, only because I don't deal with that end of it. I don't have to worry about placement to the degree that I would ordinarily The way I'm working, if worse comes to worst I can just wipe the whole thing out and start over. That's a lot harder to do on artboard. Isn't lettering an interesting job!

DARREL: *It seems like placement could be a real important aspect in a book like LONE WOLF AND CUB. Do you take any special care to kind of balance things or anything like that?*

WILLIE: Well, the placement is basically already determined for me, though. We pretty much put words into existing balloons. Most times they fit, and if they don't fit then we'll redraw the balloon, usually bringing them down and then touching up the artwork. So placement for me is really not the problem so much as just making a block of copy that's balanced and approximately in the shape that's already there. On the sound effects there's a little bit more freedom. But I work on a sheet that's laying on a Xerox of the art and when they get to pasting it up, that's when the placement is really done. I generally letter these things so they can slap them down in no time, but sometimes I may letter a little too big for Alex's taste and then they change the size of the thing until they're satisfied with it.

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"I don't think the violence is as bad."

A Schubert's-eye-view of L.W.&C.

Oh, I don't know if Alex mentioned this, the titles on LONE WOLF AND CUB — I did a few of them but Alex wanted a different style, something approximating the Japanese brushwork style, so he's been doing them since. I just have not been able to get that style down the way he wants. That's what our art director is like. Actually, he refers to himself as the art dictator. *(Laughter.)* But anyway, most of the hard work on this is done at the production end, as far as placement is concerned. I do sweat the style of the sound effects

DARREL: *How did you develop the lettering style you use on LONE WOLF, like what sort of problems did you encounter with the sound effects?*

WILLIE: The first problem I ran into was that they would ultimately be too large and they would have to go through an extra stage of reduction to get them down to size, so they tend to be a little more understated. They're definitely not like AMERICAN FLAGG where you've got them all over the place. Outside of that, some of their sound effects are a little bit different as far as the kind that you get. You don't get too many mechanical sounds in LONE WOLF AND CUB.

DARREL: *So you would try not to use mechanical looking letters?*

WILLIE: Yeah, sort of. I do try to add a *few* different shapes, like there are places where there are letters that have little points on the bottom or just a wavering line. I've been a little timid about doing stuff in solid black, for various reasons.

DARREL: *Well . . . lettering in one sense is kind of the necessary evil in comics.*

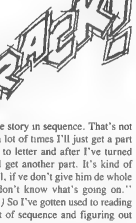
WILLIE: In some ways, yeah. It's a job you generally notice if it's a bad job. It shouldn't call a great deal of attention to itself. You don't notice the lettering if it's well integrated with the artwork. In some books, like in AMERICAN FLAGG specifically, by **Chaykin** and **Bruzenak,** the sound effects were in the foreground a great deal, panels would be *filled* with sound effects. But that was how that book was designed, part of the style of the whole thing; generally, you don't want to do that. I always wish that there were ways to reduce the sound effects in LONE WOLF AND CUB to smaller pieces like they were in the original Japanese symbols, but then nobody could read them. That would make doing the sound effects something of a futile exercise

DARREL: *Maybe you could just squeeze the letters together, or do them all on top of each other.*

WILLIE: Guaranteed unreadable, yeah

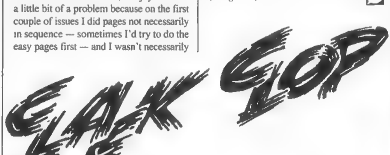
DARREL: *On the whole, what do you think of LONE WOLF AND CUB?*

WILLIE: On the whole, I enjoy it. I had a little bit of a problem because on the first couple of issues I did pages not necessarily in sequence — sometimes I'd try to do the easy pages first — and I wasn't necessarily



reading the story in sequence. That's not unusual, a lot of times I'll just get a part of a book to letter and after I've turned that in I'll get another part. It's kind of like, "Well, if we don't give him de whole plan, he don't know what's going on." *(Laughter.)* So I've gotten used to reading stories out of sequence and figuring out what's going on, you know. When it comes to LONE WOLF it's better if you read them in sequence. I've started to read them when I get them, before I start the lettering process. The stories are pretty good.

Personally, I'm a little surprised that they're doing so well. I guess I just didn't expect something I really like to do well, which generally seems to happen. The only complaints I've heard are with the violence of the book. I don't think that the violence is all that bad, that sort of thing doesn't really bother me. That may say something about me, I don't know. *(Laughter.)*



VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Willie Schubert
Born: 19 March 1952 — Chicago
Residence: Libertyville, IL
Occupation: Letterer
Credits: BADGER; LONE WOLF AND CUB; assorted TROLLORD stories; a strip called LOOSE ENDS which I drew and wrote; DREADSTAR; a number of issues of AMERICAN FLAGG; NEXUS — essentially, I work for First
Training: Mostly self-taught, with courses from the Alex Wald School of Hard Knocks
Favorite Comics: NEXUS; FRENCH ICE; SAM AND MAX
Hobby: Real life, but who's got the time

"I came on as a production person."

When Paul Guinan was much younger, his father would take him to the local foreign cinema to see the latest installments of the "Baby Cart Assassin" series. As much as he enjoyed these movies, even with the subtitles, little could he realize that, years later, he would have the opportunity to work on the very books the films were based on. Paul has one of the more difficult jobs on First Comics' LONE WOLF AND CUB; fixing the art when there is nothing wrong with it. That sounds insane but it's really not, so let's find out from the man himself what it's all about...

DARREL BOATZ: *How did you wind up working on LONE WOLF AND CUB?*
PAUL GUINAN: I graduated with the intention of going into television or film, but I always loved drawing and so I worked at ad agencies doing storyboards for television commercials and such. I found that I wasn't allowed to be very creative in that field, plus there was a lot of anonymity there. You would come up with some ideas and they would either be subverted and you would never hear of it again, or they would take them and someone else would claim them. And I just didn't like the people working in the ad agencies — it's very crazy there — so I eventually gravitated towards comics, which I loved as a kid.

I didn't take them very seriously until I started seeing what could be done with the medium, like what **Howard Chaykin** or what some of the European artists were doing, so I sort of rediscovered it. I applied for some work here at First Comics, and at the time they weren't taking on any new artists, but I was pretty much looking for anything and I came on as a production person. Eventually, I picked up some inking work and got a chance to work with **Doug Rice** doing a back up for him in DYNAMO JOE, and when they got the deal for LONE WOLF they asked me to do the paste-ups on it. So that's how I got started doing that.

It's quite fun. It's like being an assistant, I guess, like the old masters had working on their paintings and frescoes and such. I almost feel like I'm doing assistant work on this. Because of the way the left-to-right reading works, sometimes we need to change the balloon positioning — and there will be a giant hole left in the artwork, which we'll have to fill in. There's one particular case in issue #3 where a Buddhist monk is chanting a prayer that was too complex to translate properly, to give it justice, so it was left out, and I had to refinish his shrine in the style of the original artist. It's a challenge and also it's enjoyable to do.

DARREL: *And does this satisfy your urge for creativity now?*
PAUL: Well, at least as far as working on staff. I know a lot of free-lancers en-

PAUL GUINAN

"Global — the Japanese company we deal

joy the creative aspect of being able to work at home at their own pace and in their own style, whereas a staff artist is a little bit more regimented. You get assignments and you sort of have to go about it in a certain way, there's a certain approach that you will have to take. But it does satisfy my creative urges, because I am given the freedom to go about completing my work however I feel it's best to do. I work closely with our art director, **Alex Wald,** and of course he checks to make certain that it follows in spirit with the original material, so I don't have complete free reign.

But another example, a lot of the balloons in the original material are rather big and when we letter in English it floats quite a bit within that balloon shape. Over at Eclipse they have solved that problem by lettering quite large — they have *huge* text for their balloons — but in our case we keep the ratio as close to comics as we can and simply bring in the balloon, make it a little smaller. So I'll have to bring in the balloon, say, an eighth of an inch or so, and retouch the art in this halo around it and connect the art to the edge. That's done quite often.

DARREL: *What about flopping the art or rearranging it?*

PAUL: That was one of the things from the outset, whether to flop the entire page so that it's a mirror, or simply rearrange the panels. Word got back to me that **Tim Truman** was complaining that the rearranging of panels disturbed the flow of the art and that the entire page should be flopped the way that they do it over at Eclipse. But it was Global themselves, the Japanese company we deal with, that insisted on historical accuracy, that everybody remain right-handed, the samurai, that their kimonos were folded correctly, etc. So, what we do is when we get the original page we simply retain the original sequence rather than flopping the art. Every now and again certain panels might be flopped because of the flow, because certain things once the panels are rearranged might not flow as smoothly, and so occasionally we will mirror, but only within individual panels.

So we rearrange the panels and then go about the whiting out and replacing of sound effects and such like that. It's kind of tricky, you know, as to how to put across material that American audiences will enjoy and also will please the Japanese and be accurate, and that *also* remains as close to the integrity of the source material as possible. Decisions like that are made almost in every panel. We agonize over just how much we need to change and how much we need to keep intact. But if you compare it — which I know is very difficult because it's hard to get a hold of the original manga — but if you compare the books you will find that we're very true to them.

Paul takes the original Japanese page, (above), rearranges the panels, blots out the text, and retouches the holes, (opposite, right), then adds English and final retouching (far right.)

I personally think — of course, I know that this sounds biased — I think it's a *lot* closer than the stuff that they're doing over at Eclipse. If you look at some of that material, they simply reverse the page, they don't take as much care in the lettering as I feel that they should, and their retouching is *very* obvious. I quite often see cut lines, and their attempts to match zip-a-tone patterns by hand, I think, is a mistake. In our publication, if a sound effect appears over some kind of mechanical zip-a-tone, we'll remove the tone, replace it with a matching tone, and then the English sound effect will lay on top of that seamlessly. If you look at any one of our books — and I'm *especially* proud of this — you'll be very hard pressed to find any cut lines or any indication that the artwork has been tampered with. I try to make it as seamless as possible, right down to getting out the magnifying glass. I work at a one-to-one ratio, we don't blow up the art or reduce it, so what's printed is the size that we're working at. To make certain that there's no trace, I have to get my 000 Rapidograph pen and really go in there with a fine-tooth comb. *(Laughter.)* I have a couple of examples.

DARREL: *Great. Why don't you talk about those.*

PAUL: I have a three-step of one page that's an ideal example. The first page is the way it originally appears in the Japanese manga, left-to-right reading, with all of the Japanese text and such intact. The second one shows how the panels are rearranged for right-to-left reading, and how the text is blotted out and the holes that are created by the missing sound ef-

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with, insisted on historical accuracy."

KA-
WHUNK
SHUNK
SHUNK
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"...Chaykin's dialogue drives me nuts."

it. I guess some in the American audience might be a little alienated by that because they're so used to fast-paced superhero material in which everything is set and resolved in 20 pages. But 20 pages in our book — okay, in LONE WOLF #5, I believe, in the story called "Headless Sakon," for at *least* the length of an American book, say 25 pages, it's nothing but a face-off between Lone Wolf and his adversary in that issue. You really feel the tension there — they imagine how their duel will go, what strokes they will use and so on, it's a marvelous sequence. I think it's absolutely brilliant! That would be impossible to do in American comics, we just don't have the space.

DARREL: *I don't know a whole lot about samurai and Japanese culture but I read somewhere that the samurai — when they faced off — would be like grand chess masters and try to play out the whole duel in their heads before any blow was actually delivered.*

PAUL: That's what this issue deals with, and it's really fascinating. Some of my favorite scenes in the more classic samurai films by **Kurosawa**, say, the actual duels take place for a only a few seconds and it's the face-off that takes up most of the scene, where they stand and stare at each other for five or ten minutes. When they actually go at it, zap, it's over. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Approaching LONE WOLF from the artistic perspective, do you feel at all uncomfortable working on somebody else's highly-acclaimed art; that even if it's necessary, there's a sense of being uncomfortable that you are messing with something that people have a great deal of respect for and value highly?*

PAUL: Well, personally, I think what I'm being quite faithful to the artwork. I don't feel that I'm necessarily ruining it or changing it in any way. It's almost like restoring a great painting, and that sometimes has interesting results. When **Rembrandt's** "The Night Watch" was restored, cleaned, it turned out it was taking place in the middle of the day. There are things like that, where certain frescoes in churches are retouched or fixed up so that a new generation of people can appreciate them, or in this particular case a different culture. I truly believe that we've remained completely faithful to the source material

As far as being intimidated by working on something that's so highly acclaimed, I sort of got over that, in a way, in some of my inking work. My first assignment for First Comics was to ink **Tom Sutton** on GRIMJACK, and he had been a childhood favorite of mine! I remember

"I had a lot to interpret with Tom Sutton's pencils — they're *very* loose..."

reading some of his material that he did for PLANET OF THE APES, admiring it a great deal, so when I got the assignment — and especially if you've seen **Tom Sutton's** pencils, they're *very* loose on occasion — I had a *lot* to interpret and it was *quite* intimidating at first But once I got into it I realized that, you know, it was sort of essential *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *The reason I brought that up, a few months back there was a big*

hullabaloo about the cleaning and touching up of the Sistine Chapel. There were people on both sides. One side would be saying it looks better and the other side would complaining that it doesn't look like it should anymore. That's a real concern.

PAUL: Yeah, that is. I guess it's subjective. Where you stand depends on how close you want to get to the original, and there's this whole thing about just not touching it. A lot of things are the way they are just by the natural result of age. Sometimes history makes serious mistakes because of that Greek and Roman statuary was *painted*. It wasn't white. When they completed a statue they would paint it, color it, but after thousands years and being buried or whatever, eventually the paint came off and you were left with wonderful white marble statues When **Michelangelo** saw them he decided he wanted to recapture that glory and he went out and *specifically* got that white marble to do his work in, not realizing that the only reason they'd sculpted in white marble was because they were *sitting* on it, there were tons of it all over the place. They didn't really care about the fact that it was this wonderful white marble, they painted over it. So, sometimes these judgements depend on where you stand.

DARREL: *Well, is there anything you would like to add?*

PAUL: Well, I hope somebody is going to clean up my syntax in some of this. *(Laughter.)* I've always wondered about that, when you give interviews that are recorded for print just how... again, I guess, it goes back to this LONE WOLF thing, how much you want to remain faithful to the person's lack of the command of English. *(Laughter.)* But, then, you have to present your readers with an understandable text

DARREL: *Yeah, we kind of straddle the line. We try to remain true to conversation, but have to clean things up sometimes just so it makes sense on paper.*

PAUL: Right. A funny thing that I liked in **Howard Chaykin's** work, he *loves* to write fragmented dialogue, where people start sentences and never complete them. Sometimes that drives me nuts. I know if I were in your position or **Kraft's** position I would certainly want to clean up things like that

DARREL: *On the other hand, we can't add anything to what was said, that would be crossing the line. Well, my last question then: What are your feelings about the original work and do you try to convey your feelings about it in the work you put into it?*

PAUL: That's kind of interesting. I

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"I try to emulate the *feeling* of the line."

remember, years and years ago, seeing films that the strip was based on, and being quite fascinated with the samurai genre — I love it all very much. It's rather interesting how things come around. I loved **Sutton's** work when I was a kid and eventually wound up having the opportunity to ink his work, and some of his best stuff, he did some wonderful stuff on GRIMJACK. I remember seeing the movies when I was a kid and now here I am working on this material, and I certainly see why people like **Frank Miller** go absolutely nuts over this because it is *truly* a different way of approaching the medium.

Being a self-described filmmaker who also likes to draw, I am fascinated with the potential of combining cinematic techniques with illustration, and this is one of the best examples of that. You really get a cinematic sense from reading this book, and I always thought that comics should try to move toward that a little more, and yet, of course, still retain the graphic elements that are different in design and drawing and such.

DARREL: *And you can look at some of the works of Kurtzman and Eisner and see that they employed sinematic techniques quite a bit.*

PAUL: And they are considered among the giants in the field, and I certainly have nothing but praise for **Goseki Kojima.** As a film buff, I appreciate his use of cinematic techniques in the medium, and that's what I strive for myself as I work towards honing my craft. I know people say it's a separate medium than film and should be treated as such, but since it is a sequential narrative I think there's a lot of *advantages* in using cinematic techniques. And **Kojima** is one of the best people that I've seen doing that.

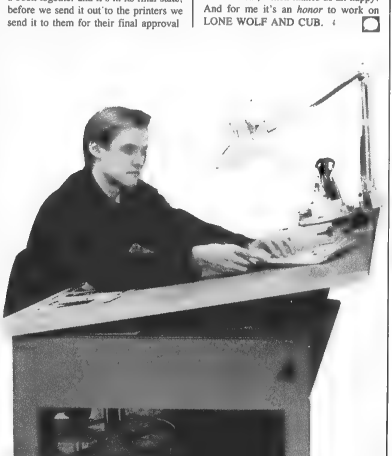
DARREL: *So, that's what you try to put into your work on LONE WOLF AND CUB, that feeling you have for the cinematic technique?*

PAUL: Sure. I don't know if I am necessarily able to bring that to this work since I have to follow certain guidelines. It's sort of a funny situation, where the less that you see of *my* input into this project means it's a better job that I'm doing. So I'm not *changing* anything, if anything I'm adding what would probably be there anyway. Like, if I'm trimming down a balloon, or if the Japanese sound effect has taken up more space in a panel than what will be our English sound effect, all I'm doing is simply extending the style and technique that's already in place, just retouching the lines and such. I'm trying to emulate exactly the *feeling* of the line. Every now and then when there's a detailed scene and no indication where to go from there, just sort of a hint because this building trails off this way, I have to look at what's there and think up what *might* have been there; like when people are restoring Egyptian tablets or, you know, things where pieces are missing, and these archeologists or anthropologists or whoever have to guess at what might have been there originally.

DARREL: *Well, one last* last question — this should have occurred to me earlier — have you met with or had any contact with Goseki Kojima?

PAUL: No. I've heard he's fairly reclusive. The stories that I hear, which are unconfirmed, of course, are that **Kojima** and **Kolke** are fairly reclusive, that they tend not to even show up at the offices. They work out of their homes — as do people here in the United States — and . . . I guess they're fairly intense people. I don't believe anybody in our company, with the exception of **Rick Obadiah,** has actually had discussions with them. You know, every time we put a book together and it's in its final state, before we send it out to the printers we send it to them for their final approval They send back a telex suggesting certain changes, usually minute, a spelling or some proper noun or perhaps this panel needs to be changed, reflipped or something, and even in those situations it's not the writer or the artist who is making these final corrections, it's the publishing company.

But it has gotten back to us that they have seen it and that they have been *quite* impressed with the package. I believe they probably had initial doubts, not just of *our* handling the material, the whole concept of it being handled by any American company, because I guess their assumption of our industry here is simply that of superhero pulp. They were concerned that LONE WOLF AND CUB would be handled correctly, and when they saw the final result they were *surprised,* quite surprised, and pleased. So it's gotten back to us that **Kolke** and **Kojima** have seen our stuff. I think **Kolke** is familiar with English and he appreciates the translation, and **Kojima** has seen what we've done with the art and he's given his okay. So we've got nothing but positive responses from Global, which makes us all happy. And for me it's an *honor* to work on LONE WOLF AND CUB.



"Around '77 I decided to learn Japanese.

ALEX WALD

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Alex Wald has one of the more fascinating jobs on First Comics' LONE WOLF AND CUB. In a sense, we here at COMICS INTERVIEW perform a similar feat because we take the rough spoken word and smooth it on paper, but Alex's work on LONE WOLF AND CUB is the truly arcane art of bridging languages . . . taking a rough translation provided by the Japanese and adapting it to read smoothly in English. Also, since Alex is too modest to mention it, we'll reveal that as art director, he did the logo for the book, as well as the basic design — *and strikingly distinctive* — *cover design.*

DARREL BOATZ: *How did you end up reading Japanese?*

ALEX WALD: Well, this is kind of a convergence of several interests I've had over a number of years in Japanese art, Japanese comics, Japanese films. Some of it goes way back into childhood from when I saw GODZILLA movies or samurai movies in the theater or on television. The comic books, I think the *first* time I saw a Japanese comic was around 1970, so I've been *aware* of them for quite a while, but I didn't really collect them until considerably later. I should mention that I hadn't read American comics for many, many years; I had stopped reading American comics when I was 13 or so. I collected undergrounds for a while in the '60s, but that was about it. Superheroes held little or no interest for me whatsoever

When I was in art school, I had a teacher of Japanese descent who took an interest in *my* interest in the material and would point me in certain directions to expand my knowledge of the field and the culture. I became *very* interested in Japanese printmakers of the 19th century and was trying to incorporate some of the visual conventions from their style of drawing into my own work. It seemed to me that there was a lot of continuity with Japanese art that was hundreds of years old with things that were being done on the popular level for a contemporary audience, and this interested me very much. It wasn't until about '77 or '78 that I *really* started looking at manga with a renewed interest, trying to understand something about the stories that were going on.

So, as a result of several of these interests; printmaking, films, Japanese manga, around 1977 I decided that it was time for me to learn the language. Unfortunately, I did it in a very backwards way. I just went to Japanese people and asked them to show me a thing or two about the writing. "What does this mean? How do I pronounce this?" And I started out with a phonetic chart and then just took off from there. After awhile I was buying dictionaries and working with a phonetic chart and doing things in complete phonetic translations from *simple* characters from books that were for children, like the simpler cartoon and television magazines.

DARREL: *So you sort of taught yourself Japanese?*

ALEX: At the start. One of the problems with that, though, was that I would fill up *pages* with phonetic transliteration that would tell me how the words on the page were pronounced, but it didn't tell me what anything *meant*. So much of the language is contextual that it was very difficult to look up individual words, or even know where a word began and ended. They don't use word spacing the way we do and their punctuation isn't as formal as ours. It's difficult, for a novice, especially, to look at a sentence and tell which are the verbs and which are the nouns and which are the participles.

DARREL: *Japanese, the written language, is a cuneiform isn't it?*

ALEX: No. Japanese writing consists of three orthographies. There are two phonetic systems collectively known as

Unfortunately, I did it backwards."

"The Japanese need to know 2,000 Chinese

YOU KNOW, WE'RE THINKING OF RE-OPENING A BRANCH ON YUUM.
WHY COME BACK? I THOUGHT MARS SUITED YOU
I THOUGHT SO, TOO FOR A WHILE.
I WISH YOU WOULD COME BACK. MOVE IN WITH ME.
THAT WOULD BE QUITE THE EMOTIONAL ROLLER-COASTER.
STRAP IN. WE'RE HITTING AN EVENT HORIZON.
1987 First Comics, Inc.

From one of Alex's favorite comics, NEXUS.

kana. There is *hiragana*, which is a cursive form for writing native words and for the parts of speech, and there is *katakana*, which is an angular form for transcribing foreign names and terms. Then *kanji* is their name for Chinese characters. The complicated characters that really *throw* most people are characters that the Japanese have borrowed from China. There's a minimum of 2,000 characters that are considered essential, and these are the characters that one sees in magazines and newspapers and comics. There are really 2,000 of these Chinese characters that one needs to know in order to graduate high school

DARREL: *And you are working as an interpreter on LONE WOLF AND CUB?*

ALEX: Well, on LONE WOLF AND CUB I do what I call an adaptation. We're provided with an English translation from Global Communications, and that reads fairly well. It's rough in spots, but it allows you to follow along and get the sense of the story. Occasionally, their translation is a little vague, or sometimes too literal, and the English is only a rough concept of the dialogue. In places like that I will definitely go back to the original Japanese text and try to make a translation from scratch, to see if I understand what it is that they're trying to tell me in English. Sometimes, only *after* I've read it in Japanese do I understand what the English is about, I then combine the English version supplied to me with my own translation, and come up with a new text which, I hope, smooths it out for the average American reader. It's a rather laborious process, and as a result of that, and because I am *not* at all *fluent* in the language but can piece it together with some labor, I don't try to do a full translation from scratch on every issue. But I do go into selected parts of my story for my own clarification

DARREL: *When you read translations you quite often find instances of this — there will be something that in its original language has a meaning that is not conveyed by the literal translation of the words, and that meaning has been lost and that phrase seems out of place. It loses something in the translation. I'm reminded of a story I heard some time ago that when Coca-Cola went into China their advertisement "Coke Adds Life" in Chinese became "Coke Brings You Back From the Dead." (Laughter.)*

ALEX: Which is not a bad idea.

DARREL: *Do you run into this?*

ALEX: This isn't as awkward as that. In the case of LONE WOLF AND CUB there are enough people involved in both *Japan* and America that these kinds of cross-cultural gaps don't occur. What is more difficult to convey is the *subtlety* of their language. They have a variety of ways for saying something like "Who are you?" There's a polite way, there's a very polite way, there's an *extremely* polite way. Then there are less formal ways, an

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Alex Wald
Born: Chicago — 25 July, 1949
Residence: Chicago, Illinois
Occupation: Art Director, First Comics
Education: Bachelor of Fine Arts, Painting, Art Institute of Chicago
Credits: Colorist on Howard Chaykin's THE SHADOW and AMERICAN FLAGG! and many First Comics titles. Illustrated the "Clonezone" story "The Audit." Pin-up illustrations for Dark Horse's GODZILLA #2 and Britain's FANTASY TALES. Monster sculptures featured in Japan's UCHUSEN MAGAZINE. Curated an SF media show called ROBO KAIJU for the Art Institute of Chicago. Curated another media show called THANK YOU, GODZILLA for New York's JAPAN SOCIETY. Additionally, paintings exhibited in various galleries.
Favorite U.S. Comics: Nexus, Badger, Love & Rockets, Clavin and Hobbes
Favorite Japanese Comics: AKUMA-KUN and GEORGE NO KITARO by Shigeru Mizuki, DEVIL-MAN by Go Nagai.
Influences: Arthur Machen, Tex Avery, Fritz Leiber, Bill Wilder, Jack Vance, E. C. Segar, Akira Kurosawa, Balthus, Max Ernest, H C. Westerman

characters to graduate high school."

informal and a rude and a very rude way. All for saying the same thing. Without embroidering the speech a lot in English it's impossible to convey a character's feelings when they're saying something like that.

DARREL: *Something like "Who are you?" in English, we'll use the same words but it's how* we say it.

ALEX: Right, in English we use inflection a little bit to say it rough and rude or gentle and soft. But in Japan the choice of words will determine the tone that the reader should be getting. There are a number of instances like that. I find also that some of my understanding is hampered because the story is taking place in the 1600s. There were even more complex forms of courtly behavior and elaborate effusions and polite speech, and the characters will use what are now archaic forms on certain occasons. Furthermore, it's often a very *indirect* language.

DARREL: *How so?*

ALEX: It doesn't always get right to the point. It implies that the person listening knows what the subject being discussed is, so they're often talking about something that they *understand* is being discussed from context, but as an outsider I really have to be following the story closely to know what it is they're saying.

DARREL: *Could you give us an example perhaps?*

ALEX: I could give you an idea. To incorporate that kind of thing, because I can't ignore it completely, we do modify things a little bit. Using the "Who are you?" example, there are times where I might translate it as "And who might you be, kind sir?" Another time it might be, "Who the fuck are you?" *(Laughter.)* It's all the same language, but it's their choice of words that conveys the meaning.

DARREL: *So, you work with a translaed version of the script and also with the orignal material?*

ALEX: Yeah. My work table looks something like this : I'll have a bound copy of ACTION COMICS LONE WOLF AND CUB, which is a reprint actually, but it's the original material. I have a set of Xeroxes of those same pages that I can write notes on. I have a text in English, a manuscript from Global Communications, their translation of that chapter. And —

DARREL: *And who does that translation?*

ALEX: That translation is by **David Lewis** and **Christine Miyuki Martin.** Christine is Japanese, her last name is her married name. So either Christine or David does a first translation, then the other one does a cleanup draft, so it's kind of a collaboration. However, a number of them are **David Lewis** alone, and **David Lewis** is an American who lives in Japan and has family there.

DARREL: *So you have all of this material on your desk.*

ALEX: No, wait, I'm not through yet. I also have copy of **KANJI AND KANA,** which is a character book. I have a second character book, because they're slightly different from one another. I have a Japanese-to-English dictionary, which is about three inches thick. And then I have this super-dictionary, which weights about ten pounds. *(Laughter.)* That's to look up *really* tough characters. And I'll use an English dictionary and a thesaurus, because sometumes the word that they give me in English is archaic. It's not just something that's in common usuage anymore, and you get a mental block sometimes. I had one in the script just this week where they talked about "corvee labor." I'm going, "What the hell is corvee labor?" I looked it up in the dictionary and it's defined as "forced labor such as a landlord would impose on an indentured servant." Now that's pretty specific, but

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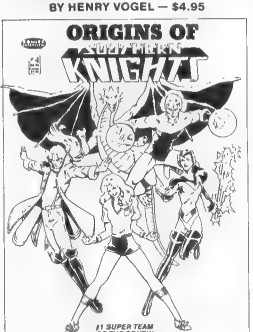

"• It's been a while since I've recommended *Southern Knights* (Comics Interview, $1.75 each) but my enthusiasm for it has not waned. I haven't a lot of space and time to spare, so let me just reiterate that this is a super-hero team based in Atlanta, the writing is by the extremely able Henry Vogel and the very good art is by Willie Peppers, and that the outstanding member of this team is Dragon. Dragon is not a man who can turn into a dragon; he is a dragon who masquerades as a man. Check out this series, please. For the earliest issues, you will probably have to settle for *Early Days of the Southern Knights*, a series of graphic-album reprints, since the very earliest issues of *SK* are hard, if not impossible, to locate."

— *Don Thompson*
COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

"They have sound effects for being afraid."

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it's a term that I don't feel is in common usuage, so I had to come up with an equivalent for it. Using the English word "corvee" would not be adequate.

DARREL: *Right. That's a word somebody with a dictionary and a thesaurus might use if they don't know day-to-day English.*

ALEX: Right.

DARREL: *Have you had any contact with Mr. Koike?*

ALEX: No, I've had no direct contact with the creators.

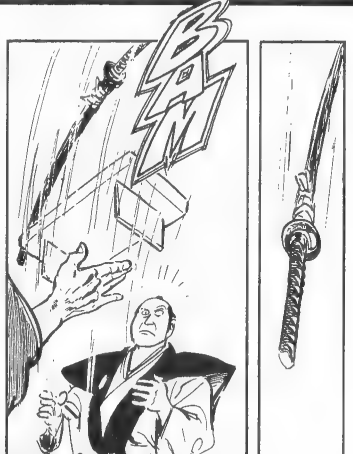
DARREL: *Do you know how they've reacted?*

ALEX: Their response? Well, I've been told by **Rick Obadiah** that they were very pleased with the book overall. Every script that goes out of here goes to Global Communications for their approval first, but that means that it's approved by Global, not necessarily by the creators. We get some feedback from them, and if there are factual errors or clarifications that are necessary, Global makes them and sends them to us.

DARREL: *You mentioned the subtlety of the Japanese language, and in talking with Kurt Goldzung the other day he brought up the fact that in the manga they will use specific sound effects that are kind of copyrighted?*

ALEX: No, they're not copyrighted, but I know what you're getting at. We should talk about the sound effects because they are not only different than what we're accustomed to, but there are sound effects for certain kinds of actions and motions — there are even sound effects for feelings — sound effects that don't correspond to *sounds* at all. They *function* as a sound effect and yet they describe a moment or a certain atmosphere that's being created, and they're things that we have no *equivalent* for whatsoever. They have sound effects for people being afraid. They have sound effects for people thinking. They have sound effects for people bowing. You know, things that don't ordinarily *make* a sound.

Instead, we try to make sure that the text, the dialogue itself, explains the situation adequately. There are certain things that are better to delete than create confusion. I could make a literal translation, I could put in English letters, "peko" alongside a figure who is bowing, but you're going to go, "What the hell is 'peko'?" A "peko" is the sound effect that they use when somebody is bowing, and means like a bound or a leap or a sudden movement. So you'll see it visually in the drawing, accompanying a movement of a character bowing to another



character, and yet the displacement of air in a bow is minimal, not enough to create a big whooshing sound. Ultimately, it's probably best to just delete it entirely rather than to include, the English letters and then an asterisk and then a caption below explaining what it is you're looking at. Where American comics have a fairly limited number of conventional sound effects — "crash, bash, thud, thump" etc. — the Japanese have sound effects which describe very specific actions. Wood falling to the ground is "kata." Something turning around is "garan garan." They have different sound effects for the kind of sword thrusts that are being made. "Dosu" is the sound of something thick being pierced very suddenly. An upward sword thrust, which is often lethal, is "zubah." When a reader sees "zubah" on a page he *knows* that character is dead, he knows it from the sound effect. Whereas if it were "basu" he would know the character has been wounded but not lethally.

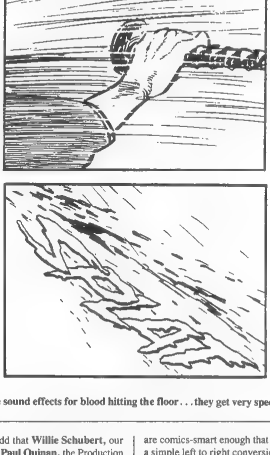
DARREL: *And in translation, what do you do with that?*

ALEX: Well, if he's being sliced this way we might have "rip." I'm trying to bridge that a little bit, I'm trying to make them a little bit more descriptive. When there are so many blades whirling about you don't *always* want to be using "swish," which has some negative connotations, or "whoosh," which makes it sound kind of empty. I'm experimenting with the sound effect "zuuwhack," which has got a "whack" in it, so hopefully it conveys the rush of the blade and then the sudden connection of blade to flesh, and gone.

DARREL: *That's really neat.*

ALEX: They have sound effects for blood hitting the floor, blood hitting a paper screen, so they get *very* specific with these things. I just wish we could translate them even fairly literally and put captions along with them to describe them, but it would be a *lot* for people to get used to. In the world sweepstakes of sound effect we Americans are barely out of the gate.

"You want to break heads sometimes."



"They have sound effects for blood hitting the floor . . . they get very specific . . ."

I should add that **Willie Schubert**, our letterer, and **Paul Quinan**, the Production Artist, do an *extraordinary* job of assimilating the feeling of the original visual sound effects, yet making them accessible for American readers.

DARREL: *Rick Oliver told me what you would like to do ultimately would be to produce as close to the original as possible, where we'd start with what to us would be the back of the book and it would be there in its original form with the only addition being an English translation.*

ALEX: Oh, I think that would be great, yeah. I think that would be the best way to produce these things. It was a group decision to make them read left to right as all other American comic books do. I think ultimately, though, it's not *that* difficult to make the conversion of reading right to left, where your book opens from what we call the rear. You just start on the right top panel #1 and moving to the left you find panel #2 and moving to the next tier down on the right you're on panel #3 and so on. It's *not* a difficult conversion to make, and I think that our readers are comics-smart enough that they can do a simple left to right conversion like that.

It would make the action actually easier to follow, and it would give us less to do in production. The company that we're working with is adamant about historical accuracy. It's *very* important to them that none of the swordsmen, in particular, are left-handed, because even a left-handed person most times will learn how to use a sword with their right hand. Left-handed swordsmen do occur, but they are unusual enough that whole stories are written around them. So with our flopped over page we have to go back to an original unflopped panel once in awhile so as not to show people using the wrong hand.

DARREL: *One thing about doing the book that way, a few years ago I ran a small comics store and I had some Japanese editions, and I'd stick them up on the rack and people would pull them down and look at them, and occasionally one would sell, but most often they'd put them back up facing the wrong way.*

ALEX: They'd turn them over, yeah. That's very common. I see that now in the comics stores all the time. I see it also in the bookstores that I go into in Chinatown here. They don't like the Americans to browse through the racks because they turn all of the books over. I mean, it's like this *arrogance* that most Americans have, that you go into somebody else's culture and you assume that they don't know what they're doing. I've *seen* people do this and it's just idiotic, and you want to break heads sometimes.

DARREL: *They never think maybe there was a reason why it was backwards. That would be one thing about producing LONE WOLF AND CUB the backwards manga way — I hate calling it backwards —*

ALEX: Yeah, it's not backwards, it's just right to left.

DARREL: *But you would be coming up against that sort of thing.*

ALEX: There may be *some* resistance, I don't know. Personally, I think that the material is strong enough, and the appeal is strong enough, that it would overcome that kind of resistance. And yet there was a decision jointly on the part of First and Global to make the work as accessible to a U.S. audience as possible, and certainly the easiest thing you can do is make it read left to right.

DARREL: *Easier for the reader, it's a lot of work for you.*

ALEX: Right.

DARREL: *So, how do you feel about LONE WOLF AND CUB and the work you are doing on it?*

ALEX: My first experience with LONE WOLF AND CUB actually was in the films in the early '70s, seeing the subtitled LONE WOLF films that would come over here, the six movies, and I believe I've seen them all. It's been years since I've seen them, this is long before the SHOGUN ASSASSIN compilation or LIGHTNING SWORDS OF DEATH versions are made for the American market. I saw them all at a local Japanese cinema, and I enjoyed them a lot and realized that it was a series character, but I had no idea that it was from a comic series. A few years back I had read THE SAMURAI FILM by **Alain Silver**, and realized that the movies were adapted from a comic series and that the comic series far outstripped the movies in scope. Daigoro starts as an infant in the very first story and he's about twelve years old at the end of the comic series, so this is really an epic taking place in time, which is something that the movies don't really convey to you.

As far as my involvement, I feel a great sense of responsibility to maintain the authentic character of the original. I have

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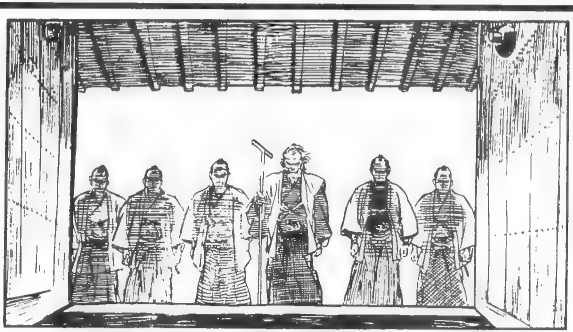
"This is their WAR AND PEACE."



the greatest respect for **Koike** and **Kojima.** They did a hell of a job. These are very solid stories. There are some that are masterpieces of action and suspense and others that are very moving and emotional. Even though they are episodic by nature, each one is like a building block, making a really impressive structure.

DARREL: *They are a part of a whole, but they are also whole within themselves?*

ALEX: Yes. Having worked five months in advance of the on-sale issue, I know a little bit more about what's coming up, but I don't know *that* much more. I'm only reading them one or two stories at a time as I go along, so I really can't tell you things that are going to happen a lot further down the road. So there are a lot of surprises in this for me, too. *(Laughter.)* It's also not a series that I was very familiar with beforehand, as **Frank Miller** was. Frank has had these books for years and has gone over them many times. Even without translations, he pored over them until he got a feel of the series overall, so he's got a much better idea of the master plot than I do. And there *are* a lot of surprises here.

I was talking with a Japanese woman today, who is not involved professionally in comics in any way whatsoever, but as a young girl in Japan she read a number of manga, as most people do. She said that LONE WOLF AND CUB is not *really* manga, it's *gekiga*, which is a term they use to describe a period drama or historical works in illustrated form. This is something that, for most people, is lifted outside of the field of just light entertainment. This is their WAR AND PEACE. This is a major work which *any* person in Japan will know. You've seen a number of articles, and COMICS INTERVIEW has some of the statements, actually, about how widespread comic reading is in Japan, and yet there are thousands and thousands of titles and artists and so on, so no one you talk to is going to be familiar with the same group of titles, however, LONE WOLF AND CUB is something that *everybody* knows, and I mean *everybody!* You can stop anybody on the street in a Japanese community and they'll know what this product is.

DARREL: *That's amazing.*

ALEX: Yeah, *I'm* amazed. This has got to be the single best known work of fiction in the Japanese language, in modern times.

DARREL: *Well, for clarification now, what is manga — the literal meaning of that?*

ALEX: Manga originally means "irresponsible drawings" — irresponsible in the sense of mischievous. They were from very early times used for satirical purposes.

DARREL: *Sort of like political cartoons?*

ALEX: Exactly. The ancestor of the manga is a scroll from the 12th century called the **CHOJUGIGA,** and that means essentially "funny animal picture scroll." *(Laughter.)* True to form, like elsewhere in the world, they started out with funny animals. The gist of this piece was that it satirized the priesthood and nobility. It was a means of social commentary acceptable to both those in the know — like the hipsters who would realise what was being parodied — and the upper classes who would never guess that there might be anything offensive about it.

DARREL: *Which is what a lot of great funny animal strips do.*

ALEX: Right. It's a 12th century Japanese **POGO.**

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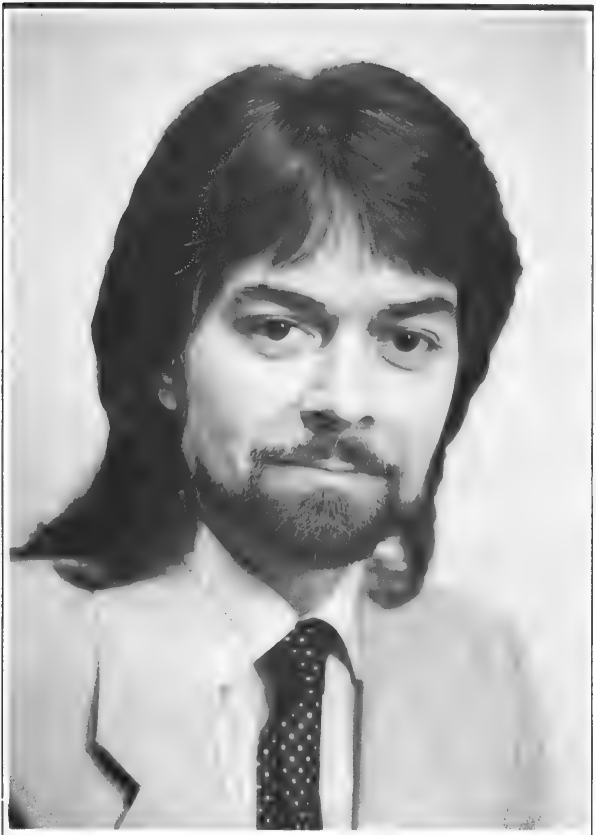
"I'm the Sales Director at First Comics."



"Howard Chaykin and I were classmates."

've always liked Kurt Goldzung. Maybe because we both hail from Jamaica Queens, that is. Or because he's a soft-spoken guy with a hard-sell. Anyway, here he is . . .

MARK BORAX: *I'm talking with Kurt Goldzung of First Comics. Kurt, what's your title?*

KURT GOLDZUNG: I'm the Sales Director at First Comics.

MARK: *How long have you been working for First?*

KURT: I've been with the company since May, 1986.

MARK: *Where were you before that?*

KURT: Prior to that I owned and operated by own comics specialty shop in south Florida, Star Comics. I did business in Star Comics for ten years.

MARK: *Did you grow up reading comics?*

KURT: Yeah, pretty much so. I'm 37 now, I've been reading them since I was about seven years old, around 30 years.

MARK: *Where did you live then?*

KURT: I was born in New York, in Queens. I went to Jamaica High School.

Howard Chaykin and I were classmates in high school. I lived in New York until I was 19, and then I was in the Navy for a couple of years. When I got out of the Navy I moved to Florida and lived there until 1985.

MARK: *Did you go through a typical period of stopping reading comics for awhile?*

KURT: Yeah. When I was about 15 or 16 I suddenly just lost interest in them and stopped reading them. I picked it up again when I was about 18. I walked into a store one day and I was waiting in line to check out and there was a spinner rack of comics and something caught my eye.

MARK: *What was it?*

KURT: It was one of the **Neal Adams** X-MENs. I think it was one of the Havok issues, actually. *No-no-no-no*, it was the one with Magneto, where Magneto is slamming his helmet down on the splash page. That was the one that got me. **Adams** at the time had pretty much broken the traditional look of comics, bringing in his ad agency background and highly illustrative style, and that really caught my eye. Then I went back and just started picking up comics here and there, and before I knew it I was going comics crazy again.

MARK: *Do you ever run into the stigma of what's a grown man like you doing in the comics industry?*

KURT: If anything, these days, since there's been so much publicity recently *about* comics — people are aware of the collectible nature of them, and some of the newer formats that are coming out — a

KURT GOLD-ZUNG

Psycho Blast

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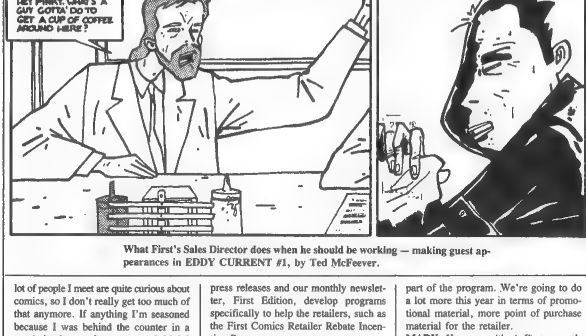
"We try to produce comics appealing to



What First's Sales Director does when he should be working — making guest appearances in EDDY CURRENT #1, by Ted McFeever.

lot of people I meet are quite curious about comics, so I don't really get too much of that anymore. If anything I'm seasoned because I was behind the counter in a comic-book store for ten years. I think I left any inhibitions I might have had about explaining what I do for a living way behind me.

MARK: *How do people as busy as you are in this industry find time for their outside relationships?*

KURT: It's difficult sometimes because when you're dealing with a career you're constantly thinking about ways to do new things. It's not a nine-to-five job in the sense that you just turn it off when you leave the office in the evening. You come home and you could be watching television or reading a magazine and come up with a promotional idea or realize that there's a certain way that you could do something better than the idea you had three hours earlier that day. Your mind is just always going all of the time. You're trying to think of new and better ways to do the things that you're doing.

MARK: *Do you put in regular hours?*

KURT: Regular hours in the sense that I'm usually in the office by 9:00 or 9:30, but leaving the office really depends on what's going on that day. Everybody puts in overtime. It really depends on the needs of the day; what's going on.

MARK: *What does the sales director do?*

KURT: *(Laughter.)* What *does* the Sales Director do? Basically, I act as the liason between the retailer and First Comics. I attend the various trade shows and conventions, arrange creator appearances, develop promotional materials, write the press releases and our monthly newsletter, First Edition, develop programs specifically to help the retailers, such as the First Comics Retailer Rebate Incentive Program.

MARK: *What is that rebate program?*

KURT: It's a program that allows the retailer to earn a 10¢ per copy rebate on five First Comics titles; NEXUS; AMERICAN FLAGG; BADGER; GRIMJACK; and JON SABLE.

MARK: *What's the intent of the rebate?*

KURT: It's an incentive for the retailers, to encourage them to increase their sales on these First Comics titles.

MARK: *Did you actually generate that idea, or did you just sort of implement it?*

KURT: Primarily it was my idea. We were looking for a plan that would help us raise our sales and also give something back to the retailer. I'm a former retailer myself, and pretty much we came up with the notion of, well, maybe one of the ways we could make this attractive would be to offer a cash rebate.

MARK: *How is the plan working?*

KURT: Well, the plan has just been introduced, so really it's a little bit too early to tell at this point. Right about now we'll be getting all of the registration forms in from all of the retailers, and we're going to be initiating a support program of promotional materials in conjunction with the rebate program. We're coming out with a special First Comics poster featuring five of the major First Comics characters that are part of the rebate program, and FIRST SIX PACK, a special black and white promotional comic, featuring the FIRST characters that are part of the program. We're going to do a lot more this year in terms of promotional material, more point of purchase material for the retailer.

MARK: *How many titles is First currently publishing?*

KURT: Currently we've got 14 titles and nine graphic novels.

MARK: *Are you going to expand your graphic novel market more, or your regular titles?*

KURT: Our editorial director, **Rick Oliver,** is actively seeking to expand the graphic novel line. We're hoping to gear up to possibly twelve a year. New comics titles, we've got EVANGELINE coming up, LONE WOLF AND CUB, and following that is PSYCHOBLAST.

MARK: *Are those superhero or fantasy?*

KURT: It's really a mix. EVANGELINE is a straight action and adventure strip. LONE WOLF AND CUB is *the* samurai graphic novel in Japan. It sold in excess of six million copies in Japan. PSYCHOBLAST is a new superhero concept by **Steven Grant.**

MARK: *Does First have any plans to diversify its products outside of just comic books?*

KURT: Well, we've already done so, actually; the **Olivia** calendar is an example — certainly our graphic novel line, we're trying to attract an older audience through that, and a bookstore audience, people who wouldn't normally *buy* a comic book. We're trying to produce material that's appealing to the average guy on the street, or to someone who perhaps hasn't read comics in a number of years. If you package it in an attractive format and make

the guy who hasn't read them in years."

© 1987 Ted McKeever

it look like a product that an adult would be proud to own, not be embarrassed to read — I think we've gotten to the point already where we're starting to do that more and more. Things like LONE WOLF AND CUB will be something that is relatively new to the American market, and is going to introduce people to a form that is *extraordinarily* popular in Japan.

The comic book is one of the true native American art forms, and the form is just so much more popular and exploited to its fullest potential in other countries rather than in the United States. I think it's time that we the people really woke up and took a look at something that we have; and really explore it and get it out there and make people realize that you don't have to be a child or a moron to read and enjoy comics; that it's a viable form of entertainment.

MARK: *How did it come about that Frank Miller was involved with that Olivia calendar?*

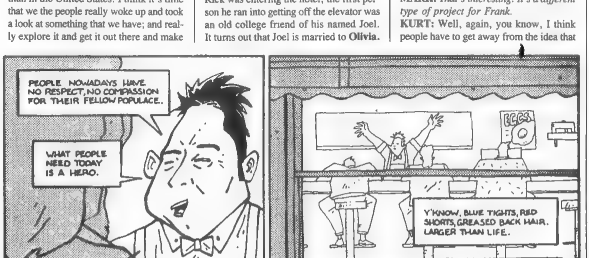
KURT: It was a long series of coincidences, actually. It all started — this story was related to me by **Rick Obadiah**, our publisher — it all happened a couple of years ago at one of the international comics conventions in Lucca, Italy. When Rick was entering the hotel, the first person he ran into getting off the elevator was an old college friend of his named Joel. It turns out that Joel is married to **Olivia**. **Frank Miller** was also a guest of honor at the convention, and so the three of them just pretty much all got together — Frank was a fan of **Olivia's**, Rick had expressed an interest in **Olivia's** work, **Olivia** was interested in seeing some of her work published — and, as those things happen, it just all fell together.

MARK: *And Frank designed it?*

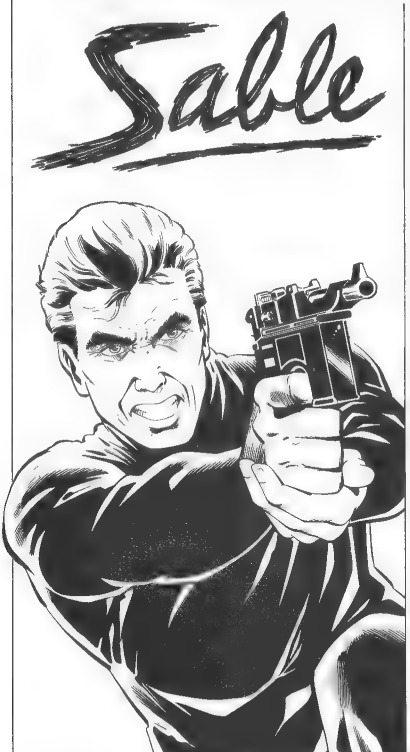
KURT: Frank designed all of the typography, and the actual calendar layout in terms of how the dates were placed and that type of thing.

MARK: *That's interesting. It's a different type of project for Frank.*

KURT: Well, again, you know, I think people have to get away from the idea that


PEOPLE NOWADAYS HAVE NO RESPECT, NO COMPASSION FOR THEIR FELLOW POPULACE.
WHAT PEOPLE NEED TODAY IS A HERO.
NOT POLITICS. NOT SPORTS. I MEAN SOMEONE RIGHT OUT OF THE COMIC BOOKS.
UGGH
Y'KNOW, BLUE TIGHTS, RED SHORTS, GREASED BACK HAIR. LARGER THAN LIFE.
SOMEONE THE PEOPLE COULD LOOK UP TO.

"There's virtually no limits on creators,



The new SABLE by new creative team Marv Wolfman, Bill Jaasfa, and Ralph Cabrera.

comics are only one type of thing, and that comic creators can only do one type of work. These people are creative artists. If you look at them in those terms, you've got to realize that they've got more than one idea kicking around in their heads, something different they'd like to do. I think everybody would like to be as flexible to where they can, you know, just take one project — I think that's one of the great things right now in the comics industry, as far as the creators go; there's such a variety of projects that they can choose from. They can either create their own projects or free-lance from company to company. There's virtually no limits, only ones that they place on themselves.

MARK: *And if you get a publisher with a lot of savvy, they can look at an artist like Frank Miller and see a different capacity to use them in.*

KURT: Well, sure, and I think an artist like **Frank Miller** realizes that there are other avenues open to him. A good number of the artists are very conscious of what goes on in the so-called fine art world. They are aware of design trends, those things are incorporated in their work, and that's what sets these people apart from the pedestrians.

MARK: *Have the issues of former unpaid creators been resolved?*

KURT: Yes. Everybody has been totally paid.

MARK: *I know that was a pressure for awhile for the company.*

KURT: Well, there are always situations that for one reason or another take some time to resolve, and fortunately this one resolved itself in due course, and everybody's happy and is continuing to work for us.

MARK: *What do you think First is offering potential creators that they can't get at some of the other publishers?*

KURT: We try to tailor the deals we make with our creative talent to best meet the specific needs of each individual creator. We offer creator rights, royalties, merchandising rights, foreign sales, superior production values, and the most consistent and on-time shipping schedule of any publisher in the industry.

MARK: *Why aren't the other publishers producing books that look of the same quality that First can do?*

KURT: Well, I guess, they just don't have the same commitment to quality that we do.

MARK: *Obviously you've proven that you can make a profit and still put out a good product.*

KURT: One of the things that has always separated First Comics from the others is

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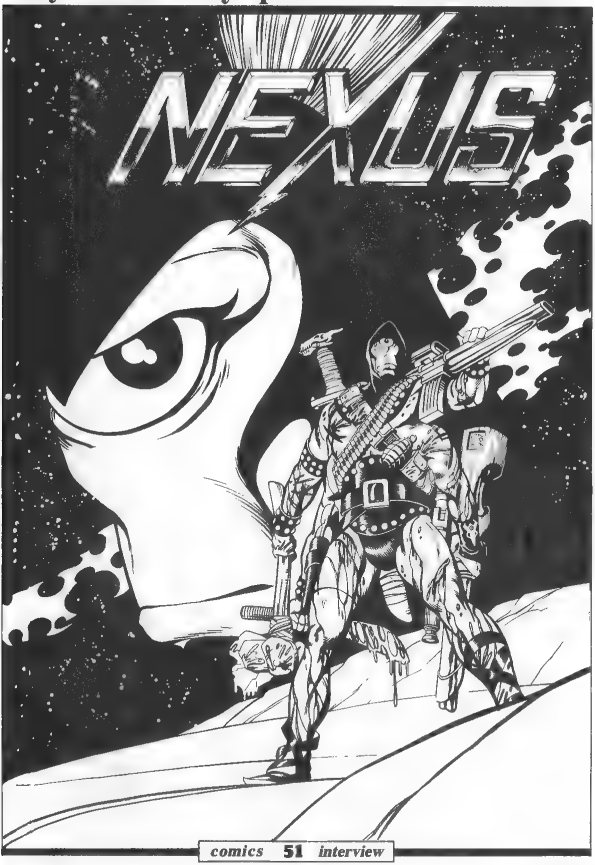
only what they place on themselves."



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"Retailers must diversify their products."

the fact that we have a definite commitment to the books that we publish. We want those books to come out on time and we want them to look as best as they possibly can look.

MARK: *As a former retailer, what does it take to convince the retailers in this particular industry how to really shape up?*

KURT: Basically they just have to understand that selling comic books, even though it's a lot of fun for a lot of the people who get into the business — I know I was one myself; it started out as a hobby — but once you get in there, especially in today's market with the incredible amount of material coming out, you have to really *treat* it like a business. You know, you have to be on top of your inventory; you have to really know who your customers are — you really have to know what they want. You have to have it there for them, when they want it. It's just incredible.

Since I left my position as a retailer, in December, 1985, the market has just... God, it must have increased 1000% in terms of the amount of material coming out. I think now more than ever the retailers who are going to survive are the ones who are really going to diversify their product mix. They're going to still rely on comics as a staple in their store, as an excellent means of getting people in their stores every week, but they're going to have to diversify more into gifts, games, videotapes... just become more of a popular culture store. That's the only way you're really going to get out there and attract new people into the stores, and get new people into reading comics; because I think after awhile you just reach a plateau where you've saturated your area, in terms of comics fans who are going to come to your store regardless.

You've got to really reach out there and get those new people in. Diversify your product line and offer something for everybody. If a parent brings in their child to buy a comic, or the collector is in there with their girlfriend or husband or wife or whoever, you have to have something there for them, too; because once you've got those people in the store, why should they just stand around and wait for these people to just buy their comic books? There should also be a lot of material in the store that is attractive to the average person.

MARK: *Do you think we're going to see more retailers, or have we reached optimum retail saturation?*

KURT: Well, I think in the past year — I know it was certainly the case in Florida where I had my store — there was tremendous growth in the market. There was just

Evangeline and feral friend.

© Kitchen Sink Enterprises Inc.

"Japanese bank presidents read comics."

an outrageous number of stores opening. One of the things that concerns me about the growth of the market, is that a lot of the new stores that are opening — they tend to open in proximity to already established stores rather than seeking out areas that do not have the shops and creating a new audience. They're going after an audience that's already existing, and as a result everybody is just competing with everybody else. Not that competition is not healthy, it can be a very good thing, but I think at this point, especially since the market really is only appealing to a *small* portion of the population, that there are just too many stores in a concentrated area.

I think eventually, if the comic stores are going to survive — to me it's analogous to the record store chains. Years ago you had a lot of little Mom & Pop type record shops, and then suddenly there was a chain. Then either that chain ran the little guy out of town or the chain bought him out, absorbed him. I think if the comic shop network is really going to be a vital one, that it eventually will exist as chains. There will be a number of major national chains.

MARK: *Like Waldenbooks.*

KURT: Exactly. The gentlemen who bought my store, **Bob Wayne**, from Fantastic Worlds in Texas — he has four stores in Texas and then expanded nationally by picking up my store in Florida. I think a lot of the people who already have regional chains are going to start to go national.

MARK: *Are you in a prime position to help the industry grow — or do you have your sights set on doing something further down the line?*

KURT: Right now my main focus is to help improve the profile of First Comics at the retail level. Since I am a former retailer a lot of my loyalties still lie with my fellow retailers. They are part of a market that has grown at an incredible rate, and a lot of the momentum has just moved them along to this point, and now they've got to get the momentum under control, they've got to stabilize it and aim it in the right direction. It's time to apply some good, solid business sense, and First Comics as a publisher wants to really let the retailers know that we are behind them. That's one of the main reasons that I'm here, is to listen to anything the retailer has to say whether it be good, bad, or indifferent. It's our goal to come out with more promotional material, and Programs such as the rebate program, to help retailers earn more money; and let them see that by increasing their sales that they can raise their dollar profit and generate more capital for their store to expand. At this point it's really hard to pick one specific thing, you know, especially being new with the company. You're exposed to so many different *factors* all of a sudden, you just more or less have to pick 'em off as they come.

MARK: *What is First Comics doing in order to really blast out of, you know, like — I don't know what the figure is, if it's like one out of every 20 people in America read comics, or one out of every 50 or 100; but we all know that there is a great, untapped market out there that, like, in the '50s and the '40s was ten times as circulated — what's First doing about that?*

KURT: We're tryig to seek out properties that are unique, that break the traditional mold. Properties that will ultimately broaden the readership of comics. We're trying to expose people to things such as, LONE WOLF AND CUB, that are really just good, solid entertainment. We're trying to develop comics, a legitimate form of entertainment, something that can be read and enjoyed by anyone. In Japan bank presidents read comic books and no one thinks anything about it, because there's something there for everyone. There's a tremendous variety of material available, and people just accept the form. It's legitimate. So basically what we're trying to do is produce books that we feel are a cut above the rest in terms of their literacy, artwork, production values, and packaging. We're just trying to develop a superior product. We're trying to get into new areas, such as the general bookstores, the college bookstores. We're really trying to get out there and let everybody know that comics are okay.

Kurt, after four days at the American Booksellers Association meeting, courtesy of John Manders.

© 1987 John Manders

"I rolled my eyes and said 'Here's a

RICK OBADIAH

Rick Obadiah is the guy ultimately responsible for everything that First Comics does, including LONE WOLF AND CUB; but that's okay with him, because he's also the guy who gets to go to Japan. He has some news you might be interested in...

DARREL L. BOATZ: *Well, Rick, how did you become a publisher?*

RICK OBADIAH: Well, I was one of the founders of First Comics and we were sitting in a room, the bunch of us who formed the company, and they asked who wanted to be the publisher and I said I did. *(Laughter.)* But more to the point, I was producing theater, producing a play called WARP — which eventually became our first comic title.

DARREL: *Yes, I remember it well.*

RICK: Good. Well, people in the comics industry contacted me in regards to securing the rights to that property, so from there one thing led to another, and the idea of First Comics was started by **Mike Gold** and myself and also a gentleman by the name of **Rick Felber.** When the three of us formed the company, the question was asked who wanted to be the publisher, who wanted to be the business manager, and who wanted to be the managing editor. Well, **Mike Gold** raised his hand for managing editor, **Rick Felber** raised his hand for business manager, so all that was left was publisher, so I said, "I'll do it!"

DARREL: *I understand from Kurt Goldzung that you have some amusing stories about LONE WOLF AND CUB.*

RICK: Well, I have stories about LONE WOLF AND CUB. Everyone else *thinks* they are amusing. *(Laughter.)* They aren't stories, they are actual experiences — so, yeah, I do.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Rick Obadiah
Born: 2 September 1948 — New York, NY
Residence: Chicago
Occupation: Publisher, President, First Comics. I've been the publisher of the company since its inception of 1981.
Favorite First Comic: They are *all* my favorites
Favorite Author: Tom Clancy, William Shakespeare, John Land

Akira Okada and **Masa Mikage** from Global Communications represented the property LONE WOLF AND CUB. They had come to the 1985 A.B.A. convention in New Orleans *specifically* to find an American publisher to handle the property. What I remember happening was I took a break and left the booth and when I returned **Kurt Goldzung** handed me their business card and said, "I really think you should talk to these people." I said, "Why?" He says, "They've got this property, LONE WOLF AND CUB." I said, "Yeah?" And he said, "*We* should be publishing this." I said, "Why?" And he said, "It's just the greatest Japanese comic of all time!" And I sort of rolled my eyes and said to myself, "Yeah, here's a guy trying to score brownie points." *(Laughter.)* He hasn't even started with us yet and he's going to start telling me what properties we should run. On the other hand, he was hired specifically as our sales director, so I figured he might know what he was talking about.

So five minutes later **Okada-san** and **Mikage-san** returned to our booth to talk to me. They showed me this book, LONE WOLF AND CUB — it was kind of like everybody was showing me stuff and I didn't really look at it. I didn't seem that interested at first. I said, "Well, sure, we'd be interested. Why don't you tell us

guy trying to score brownie points."

what you'd like us to do." Basically, I was sort of in a position where I was trying to turn them down, only because I had seen so many different projects. While this conversation was going on both Kurt and **Rick Oliver** were *kicking* me under the table, trying to get me to realize that what was being offered to us may be one of the greatest comic books of all time. But they wanted *us* to create a proposal. They said that they were going to talk to all of the different publishers there and before they left New Orleans they would make a decision as to what publishing house would get it. So I said, "Okay, give me some time to think of the proposal, come back in an hour or two and we'll have a proposal for you." So they left, and I looked at Kurt and **Oliver and I** basically said, "How can I make a proposal on a property I don't know *anything* about or *what* we can do with it?" And they looked at me and said, "That's *your* problem, you're the publisher, but we're telling you that we *must* have this property!"

So, when they came and asked us for the proposal, and I believe they indicated that they had gotten proposals from some of the other comics publishers there, they wanted to know how much we were willing to pay and how many issues we would do and all of that kind of stuff. My proposal, basically, was that they should walk around the convention and talk to all of the distributors there, and talk to people at Berkley and at Ballantine and at some of the major book distributorships that we had been dealing with, and ask *those* people who should publish the book; and that if they *didn't* give it to us they would return next year and feel very sorry that we didn't publish it. They looked quite startled! I think Kurt got weak at the knees and Oliver wanted not to be associated with me when I said that, but that's what I told them. And they said, "Well, aren't you going to offer us any money?" I said, "No. My proposal is that if you publish it with someone else you will be sorry next year." That is basically what we said to them, and they walked away quite puzzled by all of this, and I think I was about to lose my entire staff at the convention when I did that. I explained to Kurt and Rick, "What else could I do? I don't know what it's going to cost to publish this book." And the next day they came and said, "We have done what you said and we have agreed that you will be the best publisher." So they gave us the property right then and there pending finalization of the contract.

DARREL: *And you hammered out the details later?*

RICK: We hammered it out about three months later

DARREL: *Had you been at all familiar with the Japanese manga works prior to that?*

RICK: Well, I had seen the books MANGA MANGA and GOGOL 13 prior to that. When I was in Italy two years previous, I spent a lot of time with **Frank Miller** and he told me about his work on RONIN, and he mentioned LONE WOLF AND CUB to me at that time. When they showed me the property, I didn't make the connection that this was the property that **Frank Miller** thought so much of — so my experience with the manga was minor.

DARREL: *What was the process after they decided to give you the book? Did you immerse yourself in manga and try and figure out exactly what it would entail, producing LONE WOLF AND CUB for the American market?*

RICK: Once they said that we would have it, they asked me to write up a proposal and send it to them and we could start the basic negotiations, either by phone or by telex, so that when they came to America to finalize the deal, we would just have a couple of points to hammer out. One of the things that we discovered is that doing business internationally can become rather expensive. When you have a meeting you have to get *everything* done, it's not like you'll be able to get back together next week. A meeting involves thousands of miles of travel and can be very, very expensive.

Basically, **Kurk Goldzung, Kathy Kotsivas,** our operations director, **Alex Wald,** our art director, and **Rick Oliver** and I sat down and tried to hammer out

"They wanted hot dogs instead of a feast."

what we felt would be the best way to adapt the property, the best way to *present* the property; what format; would we do the book in — color or black-and-white? — how would we market this book? We put together an entire marketing campaign. We put together a whole series of different formats and probably devoted *more time* to the release of *that* property than any other single property we've put out. Then, when that was all put together we talked about the kind of deal that we would like to make with Global Communications, put *that* together and sent it to them. Then we did some negotiation by phone and telex. Finally, we were at the point where the only way to close the deal was to meet face to face; so they came to America and we meet here in our offices in Chicago; and we *then* presented to them not only our marketing plan but our advertising campaign and also the type of formats we wanted to work in.

DARREL: *Well, it seems to have paid off, you've even got LONE WOLF AND CUB outside of the comics specialty market and into some of the regular bookstores. Is that a market you originally thought about aiming at?*

RICK: That *was* a market that we originally thought about aiming at. In fact, we've been in that market prior to LONE WOLF AND CUB and that was one of the things that *we* offered Global that most of the other comics publishers couldn't offer at that time. We had plans for a major distribution system through Berkley into that marketplace, *so part* of what we had as a company was the distribution mechanism into the bookstores. And I think that is unsurpassed by other companies.

DARREL: *Do you feel that there will be more of this type of product coming over in the future?*

RICK: Oh, yeah, for sure there's going to be more material that will enter the American market. But that material in relation to the amount of material that is actually being *produced* in those countries is going to be very little. I think that our attitudes towards it — because we hear that is is acceptable all over the place — that makes us *think* that it's a lot better than the material that we produce. That isn't the exact truth. When I went to Japan, I must have looked at over 200 different Japanese titles, looking for other titles to bring to America, and out of the 200 or so that I looked at I brought back only a handful that I felt had a *chance* in the American market.

You have to understand that their culture is completely different from ours and that what you see coming into America right now is the *best* of their material. Not all their material, in fact very little of their material, is actually appropriate for our market. LONE WOLF AND CUB, though, is universal. It is probably the most appropriate comic product for any country in the world. I mean, comics are only good when the material is good. Comics, *per se*, is like anything else, there are good comics and there are bad comics; there are good movies, and there are bad movies; there are good cars, there are bad cars. LONE WOLF AND CUB finds itself in the entire comics industry worldwide as one of the most *elite* books there are, in terms of its quality.

DARREL: *So you hammered out the deal at a marathon meeting in your Chicago offices. What was that like?*

RICK: Well, you know, we have a conference room and we all got dressed up — I mean, here were these people who had just flown *thousands* of miles to meet us, right, and the one thing that we knew was that it wasn't going to be like a normal meeting where we'll meet for an hour and then we'll go for a two- or three-hour lunch. These guys have to get back to Japan. Your meetings with them start early in the morning and they continue without a break, that we knew. But we wanted to *impress* them, so we went to one of the finest restaurants here in Chicago and ordered *all kinds of great food!* We ordered a feast! You know, any American would not only *want* to be at such a feast, you would be *proud* to sit at this feast! And it was all going to be catered so we wouldn't have to interrupt our meeting.

So anyway, we were talking to them and told them lunch would be catered, told them about this feast we had ordered, and they looked kind of a little weird at us, like *(unveiled disappointment)*, "oh." **Kathy Kotsivas** — you have to realize that women have a very, very low role in Japanese business, and she is very, very, very important to our business, so we also had to deal with the problem of will these people be willing to deal with Kathy as an equal or not. Because of their cultural

Frank Miller's cover to LONE WOLF AND CUB #7.

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"25-30% of Japan has read L.W. and C."

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differences, we decided she would be part of the meeting but would be in and out. But in two seconds — call it women's intuition or whatever — as soon as I mentioned *lunch* she picked up on the fact that we were doing something wrong and that they didn't *want* this lunch. She asked them — she had the courage — "Is there something you would like other than what we have planned?" And they sort of blushed and smiled — they wanted a hot dog! *(Laughter.)* They can't get a lot of, you know, what we consider run of the mill stuff, it's a *delicacy* in Japan. They ended up ordering Polish sausage and hot dogs and French fries, because these are foods that you can't get in Japan. So we cancelled this $500 lunch and we substituted about a $3.00 lunch for them, and it *made* the meeting.

DARREL: *You could have taken them to a Cubs game.*

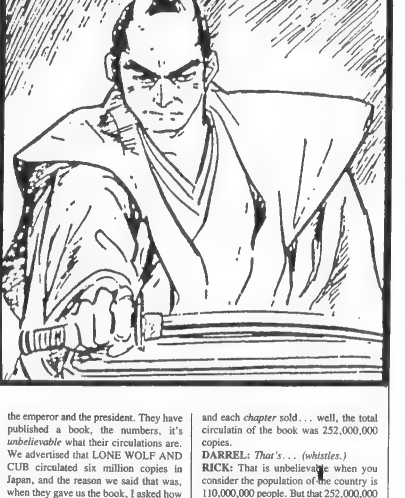
RICK: Oh, something else, we were trying to decide what kinds of gifts to give them, because gift-giving is very, very important in Japanese business. We actually didn't know what to get them. So we talked to the president of Yashica Cameras — a friend of mine is the president — and I told them we had these Japanese gentlemen coming, what should we get them? And he say, "Get 'em a baseball, buy 'em a baseball cap, *that's* what they're gonna love, because this is all stuff they know about!" The Japanese really love the American culture, so besides giving them hot dogs and Polishes and french fries, the *gifts* we gave them were autographed baseballs from the Chicago Cubs, a baseball hat, baseball gloves, and then we gave them a beautiful fine print of the Chicago skyline, mementos of their trip here to America.

So I have to tell you, the Japanese — we were so afraid of what to do — they are such genuinely warm people, it's amazing.

DARREL: *And then later on you went to Japan?*

RICK: Well, LONE WOLF AND CUB #1 came out in May and, basically, as publisher I got to be the messenger and I brought them the first issue, so I went to Japan. Part of our contract is that we meet twice a year, once in America and once in Japan, and the first meeting in Japan was scheduled after the book came out, so I could bring them copies.

I met with **Kojima** and **Koike**, the artist and writer on the book. Now it's interesting, one of the things that I found out while I was there is that these two men are possibly the most heralded men in all of Japan. They rank right up there with the emperor and the president. They have published a book, the numbers, it's *unbelievable* what their circulations are. We advertised that LONE WOLF AND CUB circulated six million copies in Japan, and the reason we said that was, when they gave us the book, I asked how many copies it had circulated and they said, "This set circulated six million." We never bothered to distinguish what they meant by "this set." This was the *third* printing of LONE WOLF AND CUB and it sold six million copies!



DARREL: *That's incredible!*

RICK: And we had based all of our advertising on that. But what we have now discovered — and COMICS INTERVIEW will be one of the first publications to bring this to light — is that it was the *third* printing of LONE WOLF AND CUB that circulated 14 volumes at six million copies *each*. Before that there was the *second* printing of LONE WOLF AND CUB which was a 28 volume set, and each volume of *that* sold eight million copies! And *then* there's the *original* printing of LONE WOLF AND CUB which ran over four years on a weekly basis in chapters, and each *chapter* sold . . . well, the total circulatin of the book was 252,000,000 copies.

DARREL: *That's . . . (whistles.)*

RICK: That is unbelievable when you consider the population of the country is 110,000,000 people. But that 252,000,000 figure is how many copies were sold on a weekly basis *total*, it's not that they sold that each week. They sold between 16 or 20 million each week.

DARREL: *That's still a real impressive figure.*

RICK: Yeah. It is a comic book that possibly as much as 25 to 30% of the population has read, and *that's* amazing. **Koike** and **Kojima** are two of the top twenty income earriers in the country, and it's primarily because they are comic-book artists. It's amazing.

DARREL: *Something else that amazes me about LONE WOLF AND CUB — when you think about it, it's* really *amazing — is that it was produced originally on a weekly grind, 60 pages a week!*

RICK: It amazes me, too.

DARREL: *Why can't we get that kind of production in this country?*

"One artist fainted when he saw Kojima."

RICK: It's just a different situation. Here you have *an* artist and he then has to draw the work. In Japan you have an artist owning a studio. What happens in the case of **Mr. Kojima,** many apprentices work under **Kojima-san** and he *trains* them to draw in his style. So the difference between the Japanese artist and the American artist, one could say, is a matter of ego. Here every artist wants his name on the book. In Japan there are many apprentices and artists who are *trained* to draw in the style of their master. There are many apprentices of **Kojima,** so what he does is he just lays them all out and he has different people working on them. In Japan that is how you apprentice, and if you become very good at what you do *then* you are given a space of your own where you develop your *own* style, and if it catches on then *you* get a studio and people follow under you.

So, it's a completely different system, *completely* different. For them, it works. I don't know if that system would work here in America and I don't push it here in America, but in Japan that is their cultural system and it seems to work very, very well. Some of the great artists from Japan, like **Kojima** and **Otomo,** started that way originally. It's a different way of producing, it's more . . . I was going to say assembly line, but that's really not an accurate discription. If you look carefully at LONE WOLF AND CUB you will *see,* though, that the *style* of **Kojima** runs rampant throughout. He's the storyteller. But they are able to produce work *faster*

L.W.&C. aint all Rick and co. publish!

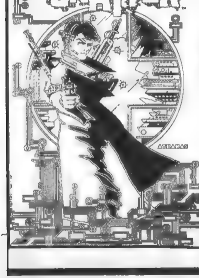
that way, and that's their system.

When I went to **Mr. Koike**'s studio, who is the writer, we walked in and there were maybe ten artists drawing different panels of the same story. And when they saw **Kojima** they literally *bowed* in awe of the man. One artist actually fainted when he saw **Kojima,** because **Kojima** is so heralded in the country. He literally passed out. Another artist there, who was working on a full *page* of drawings, he grabbed the drawings and crumpled them up and threw them into the trash can, because he felt that his work was *unworthy* of being seen by **Kojima.**

When I returned from Japan, **Alen Wald** and I went to a Japanese restaurant for sushi — I was just back and I was really into it. So we were sitting at this sushi bar and there was this guy from Japan making sushi, and I said to him "By the way, I just came back from Japan." And he said, "What were you doing in Japan?" And I said, "I'm in the comic-book business and we just bought a comic book." And he asked me what it was and I told him it was LONE WOLF AND CUB, which in Japanese is KOZURE OKAMI. And he says, "KOZURE OKAMI! Oh, *Ohoho*h!" He ran into the kitchen and *came back* with all of his Japanese comic books of LONE WOLF AND CUB! That's an amazing story, when you think about it. I walk into a restaurant and mention the name of the book and the guy brings them out. *That's* how important the book is, and how important **Koike** and **Kojima** are in Japan.

DARREL: *Getting back to your trip . . .*

RICK: But getting back to my trip, I met with **Koike** and **Kojima,** we had a business meeting — and I have to tell you that **Mr. Koike** is in his fifties now, I think, and he's become quite a businessman in the publishing field in Japan. He now is involved in golf, he has a golfing magazine. It's, you know, pictures of **Arnold Palmer** and things like that, but the reason I bring this up is because you had asked me about comic books in Japan, there is a comic book for every walk of life. In **Koike**'s golfing magazine they have interviews with **Arnold Palmer,** pictures of the U.S. Open and all of the major golf tournaments around the world, and the last eight pages have got a comic book about a character who plays golf. So that's just a little story. But anyway, I had this meeting with them, and I have to tell you I was actually *mesmerized* by **Kojima-san.** He does not live in Tokyo, he lives outside of Tokyo, in the mountains, and he doesn't come into Tokyo because he *hates* the city. He and **Koike** are partners and have worked together for, like, 15 or 20 years. This was the *first time* that **Kojima** came into the office for our meeting. He was so *pleased* with what we had done with the book that he chose to come into Tokyo to meet me to thank us for what we had done — and I really wanted to meet them, to thank them for what they had done. But anyway, we hit it off really well and he invited me to go to dinner. I was



"It starts crawling around in my mouth!"

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honored. Here is a man who has no time for anybody, and as I said he lives outside of Toyko. To go to dinner was an all day and all night affair because of where he lived — I had to cancel meetings that I had with other Japanese publishers. Having dinner with this man was really something that I wanted to do, and as it turned out, it became the highlight of the trip.

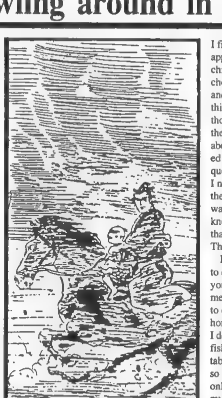
So I went to dinner with **Kojima, Mr. Okada-san,** the president of Global, and a man named **David Lewis** who was serving as one of the interpreters of the Japanese and English version, and we went to this restaurant that serves nothing but *live* fish. Not sushi, that's fish that's not cooked, but fish that are in this couple of thousand gallon tank; we're talking about fish that you pull out of an ocean, swumming around in this thing, and we ate live fish. It's an art — I think it's called *mokurisan*. It's a step beyond sushi. There are sushi masters all over the world, and then there are these *mokurisan* masters. What they do is they take a live fish and serve you live fish, they debone the fish. Do you remember in cartoons where a bear would hold a fish up by the tail and then stick it in his mouth, and then when he pulled the fish out of his mouth you had the head and the tail and the bones?

DARREL: *Right, yeah.*

RICK: Remember that? What these guys do is they take a fish, they bring this live fish in a bucket of water for you and they put it on your table and they take a towel and put it around the fish's head -- and we're talking about a fish that's maybe two feet long — and he takes a knife and cuts the fish right behind the gills, and he just fillets the fish back to the tail. Then he flips it up, turns it over and does the same thing. What he's left with there is the head and the tail and the entire bone structure, and you know how a fish's skelton just has the spine and then the little bones, well going through the spine are all of the guts and nerves of the fish. That keeps him *alive*. He's taken the meat and he hasn't severed the nerve system, he hasn't severed the blood system, okay — so you have an *absolutely live fish* that is nothing more than a head and a tail and a skelton, all of his blood and guts all intact! This sounds disgusting.

DARREL: *It sure does.*

RICK: Then they take the fish and they put it on a bowl that has two pins, they impale it on two spikes so that the head and the tail are pointing up. They then take the filleted part of the fish and slice it and then put it all *back together!* Then they



serve it to you on a beautiful bed of lettuce and all of this kind of stuff. Meanwhile the fish's mouth is opening and closing because it's quite alive, and its tail is wagging, he obviously not *pleased* with the situation. So you are actually eating live fish. And I thought this fish was kind of cute and I wanted to stick my finger in its mouth, and just as I'm about to do that **Kojima** sort of gave me a karate kick to move my hand away, and he showed me his finger where the tip of his finger is gone. He had done what I was about to do. If I would have stuck my finger in, this fish was big enough, he would have snapped and closed his mouth and probably would have eaten my finger; which is probably nice since I was eating him.

Then we had all kinds of fish. I had baby octopi. You know what an octopus is, think of a little baby one that that might be three inches with all of its little tentacles. It came in a bowl with a lid on on it and I asked them what it was and it was octopus, and I *looked* at it. It looked like the inside of your eyeball, absolutely disgusting, but they were just laying there. I figured this must be sushi — this was the appetizer, the first thing I ate. So I'm watching, they're picking it up on their chopsticks and putting it in their mouths, and they said, "Are you sure you can eat this meal?" I said, "No problem." I thought this fish was *dead*. So I picked up the octopus with my chopsticks and I was about to put it in my mouth when they asked me a question, so I was answering the question and out of the corner of my eye I noticed all of a sudden that this thing at the end of my chopstick was not dead! It was *moving*! Its tentacles were now, you know, creepy crawly kind of things, and that's when I realized . . . "Oh, my God! This fish is alive!" *(Laughter.)*

I didn't know what to do, but I wanted to eat this meal. By the way, I should tell you that the reason I was taken to this meal, this is a very ancient ritualistic meal to eat live fish, I mean this was a meal of honor. Most Americans can't do it, and I don't know how I got through it. All this fish was, like, flopping around on this table. I mean the fish are not happy. But, so I had this little octopus and I said, "The only way to eat this thing is just get it in my mouth and get it over with," Meanwhile, they are all *staring* at me because they know I'm in for a treat. So I threw the thing in my mouth and I was about to bite on it, and then I realized, "Wait a minute, do I swallow it, do I chew it, what am I supposed to do?" I had visions that if I swallowed it . . I had visions of aliens *growing* in my stomach! *(Laughter.)* All of a sudden it starts *crawling* around in my mouth! I almost threw up. So I stuck it between my teeth, chomped down on it, *killed* it in my mouth and swallowed. And it was quite good, I kept eating them. *(Laughter.)*

And you have to understand that **Kojima** speaks absolutely no English, I spoke absolutely no Japanese, **Okada-san** spoke very little English — he was always with an interpreter when I was with him — so we had this interpreter with us, who had one bite of the octopus and got sick to his stomach and had to leave the room. So I had this entire meal with two gentlemen who spoke no English, and we communicated perfectly. We drank tons of sake. In fact when they gave the sake there were two little fish *swimming* in it. I was told not to eat *those* fish, they were just in there for flavor. And sake is a clear drink, but as I ate this meal it slowly turned from yellow to putrid brown, but boy did I drink the sake. It was the only way I could get through the meal. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Sounds like a real fascinating trip.*

"The art will blow you out of the water."

RICK: I should also tell you that, although to have this dinner I cancelled some of my meetings, we have selected another Japanese book that we will be bringing out, probably in the summer of '88. And we are also planning, though it is not definite, that **Kojima** and possibly **Mr. Koike** and the artist of the new book will be coming to America to do the Chicago and San Diego conventinos

DARREL: *Can you tell us anything about the new book?*

RICK: Yes. I'll just give you a few things: it will not be a reprint; it will be in full painted color; it will run 48 to 64 pages; and it is being produced by someone who is well-known in comic-book circles, very, very well known. We are in the process of negotiating the deal and finalizing it. It now appears it will be a simultaneous release in Japan, here, and one or two countries in Europe. We are trying to make this an international publishing *event*, where in about five or six different countries this book will be released, a co-venture with our Japanese counterparts, First Publishing, as well as two or three publishers in different parts of the world. This is a *mammoth* undertaking on our part. We're kind of excited by it. I think it's never been done before. Part of getting this all to happen has been who this creator is — because he's also known in Europe for some of his work. Granted, I'm giving you nothing more than a tease. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *You're not going to give me the name?*

RICK: No. Let me put it to you this way, we teased the world with advertising for LONE WOLF AND CUB, we told the world that it would be a package and price that they wouldn't believe, and we told them that the story would be something that they wouldn't believe. Based on the sales and the reaction and the reviews it is getting, we were 100% correct. And I am telling you that I am teasing you on the next book — because that will be doubly so. The story is unbelievable and the art will blow you out of the water. The reason I don't want to tell you what it is, is because all of my competitors will figure out a way to do something real simlar real fast, faster than we're gonna get it out, and that's why I won't tell you.

International dealing takes forever, because you have things in a contract that people don't understand and you're trying to do it by telex and phone calls and lawyers overseas, and part of the problem is different words have different meanings, so it's confusing and it's taking a lot of time. There are no problems in the negotiation, it just takes a very long time to conclude. When we did the contracts for LONE WOLF AND CUB, as I mentioned, we did two or three months of back and forth information, and then to finally close the deal we all had to sit in a room with interpreters so that the interpreters could clearly understand what the terminology was. The contract for LONE WOLF AND CUB is *located* with definitions, because it had to be clear between the two different cultures what the words meant. So we're in a similar situation now. The goal is to get this book out by the summer of '88. But, as we promised the industry with LONE WOLF AND CUB, we will have a property that will go *through* the roof, not only for the pricing and the quality of what we will put out, but the story will be amazing and the artwork will be mind-boggling.

DARREL: *Are you sure I can't get you to say anything more about the new book? This creator, big famous name, is he American, Japanese, European?*

RICK: Japanese. A world known artist.

DARREL: *What sort of thing would he be famous for?*

RICK: If I said Japanese animation, if I said Japanese comics, would that help you? *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *What sort of genre can we expect?*

RICK: Well, in terms of genre I think you'd have to call it fantasy, that's a good general term.

DARREL: *Anything else you'd like to add?*

RICK: Well, they have been pretty impressed with our company, and we will probably be the first American comics company to have *its* properties published in Japanese. Some of our properties are probably going to be there around late this year or early next year, on the stands *in* Japanese. And if you've been enjoying LONE WOLF, I can just tell you that we've seen and read and had translated for us the entire book, and it just keeps getting better. There's no question in my mind, this is one of the most *elite*, meaning this is the *creme de la creme* of comics worldwide. We are not only excited about it, but I have to tell you it has been quite an honor for us to have been picked by Global, **Koike** and **Kojima** to do the book

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

NUDE OR PRUDE?

Dear David:

A poor choice of cover painting for issue #42. We had to restrict sales to 18 and over and could not display the issue at all. With all the hundreds of beautiful **Frazetta** paintings available, why the irresponsible decision to run the nude?

If I don't sell out, I'm asking my distributor to take back the unsold copies.

Let's see a little more common sense in the future.

Gary L. Colabuono
President
Moondog's, Incorporated
3253 North Ridge Avenue
Arlington Heights. IL 60004

Inasmuch as there are, indeed, many Frazetta paintings to choose from, the nude was obviously in my estimation a fine choice — the finest choice. The sight of breasts should hardly come as a shock to anyone — more than half the population of the world has them, after all. The cover art was a painting, not a photo — as far as I am aware, there are no age restrictions whatsoever on who may visit museums, most of which offer on display paintings or statues of nude women. There are those who believe Frazeta's work will hang in fine company one day among them.

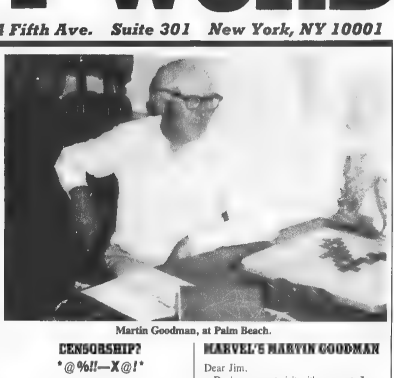
In any event, the decision was in no way "irresponsible," since as publisher of this magazine I bear legal and financial responsibility for my decisions — you can't get more responsible than that.

Back in COMICS INTERVIEW #43, you were among those calling for responsible soliciting on the part of the publishers. Need I remind you that our pre-publication advertising contained a picture of the cover painting? Perhaps you should have paid more attention when ordering.

Since COMICS INTERVIEW #42 sold out the same day it went on sale, I was going to offer all too happily to take any extras off your hands — but, as you told me at the Chicago Convention, despite being hidden away, your copies were sold in no time flat.

As you said, Gary, let's see a little more common sense in the future.

— DAK



Martin Goodman, at Palm Beach.

CENSORSHIP? *@%!—X@!*

Hey, Dave,

Have you noticed how paranoid people are now days? I'm refering mainly to this censorship deal (issue #43). The whole thing starts off with paranoid parents and communities afraid of losing their "babies." It even goes to elected officials and religion leaders who are paranoid of losing their jobs. I'm 13 and own an issue of MIRACLEMAN #9, a large collection of LOVE AND ROCKETS, ALIEN ENCOUNTERS, etc. My parents know, my parents read them. I can't imagine having to be over 18 to read a comic-book. It's not like I'm going to discover some new and startling fact I never knew before. Who's to say if someone's "mature" enough to read something; a 42-year-old man can easily be less mature than a 10-year-old boy. Talking about people having trouble with nudity displayed on the common market, I picked this issue up right out of the comics rack in Waldens. I mean, 8-year-olds were standing around, mouths dropped, at the **Hsu** page.

Your book is very well done, very professional (could use a larger letter column) and I enjoy it very much.

Arthur Crosby
5200 Robinwood Rd.
Louisville, KY 40218

MARVEL'S MARTIN GOODMAN

Dear Jim,

During a recent visit with my aunt, **Jean Goodman** pulled out a magazine and told me to read the interview with **Jerry Perles** about Martin. I did not know it was yours at first — but as soon as I saw the Table of Contents I immediately suspected and, of course, my hunch was correct.

So I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the article and its pictures. I even learned some pieces of family history I might never have known. My aunt agrees with me that you portrayed Martin very accurately and with sensitivity. She was thrilled when I told her I knew you and she remembered when I asked if you could interview Martin a few years back. We are both glad you finally got your story.

Here's hoping your publishing venture proves as rewarding to you as Martin's was to him. Please tell **Mr. Kraft** our family really enjoyed the article.

Ellen Brodsky
New York, NY

LONG LIVE COMICS INTERVIEW

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW

I recently bought back issues of COMICS INTERVIEW. It's one of the best books on comics out — what else can I say? Long live COMICS INTERVIEW!

Jeff Sampogna
474 Cumberland St.
Englewood, NJ 07631

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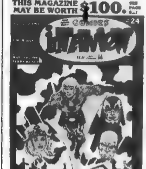

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Comics Interview

So far, there are only four titles from David Anthony Kraft's publishing company, but I like all of them.

• *MICRA* is an acronym for *M*ind *C*ontrolled *R*emote *A*utomaton. It is also one heck of a good comic book by Lamar Waldron and Ted Boonthanakit. This is a 12-issue limited series about a crippled woman who can project her consciousness into an automaton (see the title).

That is a much-too-simplified summation of a rich, complex SF novel in comic-book form. Ted's art has been compared to many different American artists (none of whose work Ted has seen; he was born in Thailand and grew up in Africa) and is remarkably clear and exciting.

Grade: A.

MICRA™
MIND CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON

• *Aristocratic X-traterrestrial Time-Traveling Thieves* (*X-Thieves* for short) has had two first issues, which is annoying to indexers and compilers of price guides, but the bright, sprightly scripts by Henry Vogel and the appropriately humorous art of Mark Propst make up for that. One of the main features of this comic book is that, like the *Mad* comic books, the panels are filled with gags, such as the crisis hotline which warns: "New universe forming — disaster imminent!"

The Southern Knights make a guest appearance in the second first issue, in which the X-Thieves steal the formula for original Coca-Cola. This is one of the best of the funny comic books (and one of the handful that really *is* funny).

Grade: A.

X-THIEVES™

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS™

• I haven't seen the last couple of issues of *Southern Knights* yet but, unless the series has gone radically downhill since #16, this is still one of the best and most original of all the supergroups. Grade: A.

• While *Comics Interview* is not a comic book, I think I can squeeze in a recommendation. This excellent publication gives a well-rounded view of the industry, with interviews with writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, and others.

Naturally, your interest in an issue will depend on who is being interviewed, but there have been 40 issues of *Comics Interview* and no totally dull ones — not even the *G.I. Joe* issue. Grade: A.

Four titles.
Four As. Four for four. Way to go, Dave.

— Don Thompson
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